

# The Paradox of Divine Justice

## 1 John 2:1

By Phil Johnson

Today I want to look at just one verse—1 John 2:1. This is a text that should be familiar to most of you, But sometimes we miss the rich truths in the most familiar texts by not looking closely enough or thinking deeply enough about what the text actually says. This is one of those important texts that is a thousand times deeper than most people will ever realize, just reading through the chapter. So I want to home in on it today and mull it over carefully. And just so that you'll have bit of the context. I'm going to start reading with another (even *more* familiar) text that's just two verses back, but separated by a chapter division. I'll start reading with 1 John 1:9, and before I read it, let me suggest to you that there's a theme that ties these two texts together, and it's the theme of God's righteousness—even in the act of forgiveness. First John 1:9:

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

10 If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

2:1 My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

I've always been intrigued by that phrase "we have an advocate with the Father." The old 1984 edition of the NIV translates it like this: "we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense." Makes it sound like Jesus is a lawyer, right? Does that surprise

you? You may have thought there wouldn't be any lawyers in heaven. I have no doubt that there will be. I expect to see at least Don Green there. But the good news is that none of them will be practicing law in heaven. There's only one practicing attorney in heaven, and that is the Lord Himself, our "advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous."

The apostle John is deliberately using courtroom terminology. He is portraying Christ as an attorney who pleads our case in God's hall of justice. It's a surprising picture of our salvation—and a vivid reminder that our redemption from sin is all about divine *justice*. We're saved by legal means in a way that magnifies the justice of God.

Now let this sink into your consciousness. I want to stress this, because lots of people completely misunderstand salvation, and they think of divine forgiveness as something that utterly overturns justice and sets it aside. As if God's mercy *nullified* His justice. As if God's love defeated and revoked His hatred of sin.

In other words, people tend to think that salvation is grounded only in the *love* and *mercy* and *goodness* of God—as if He simply decided to forego the due penalty of sin and wipe out the record of our wrongdoing and nullify the claims of justice against us, just because His love was so great that it simply overwhelmed His holy hatred of sin.

But that is an erroneous view. In fact, it is one of the main errors of the heresy known as *Socinianism*. The original Socinians were 16th-century heretics who denied that God demands any payment for sin as a prerequisite to forgiveness. They insisted instead that He forgives our sin out of

the bounty of His kindness alone. They argued that if God demanded an atonement—an expiation, a payment, a reprisal—for sin, then it isn't really *forgiveness* when He absolves us. They claimed that sin could either be paid for or forgiven, but not both.

In other words, they defined forgiveness in a way that *contradicts* and *contravenes* justice. They were essentially teaching that God could not maintain the demands of His justice and forgive sins at the same time. They thought of forgiveness and justice as two incompatible ideas.

I hope you don't think salvation works that way. One of the most glorious truths of the gospel is that God saved us in a way that upheld His justice. Justice was neither compromised nor *set aside*; it was fully *satisfied*. And our salvation is therefore grounded in the justice of God *as well as* His mercy.

And that is what the apostle Paul meant when he said in Romans 1:17 that "the *righteousness* of God is revealed" in the gospel. It's also what the apostle John means to stress right here in this context when he says in verse 9 of chapter 1 that "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and *just* to forgive." He doesn't merely set aside justice and forgive us out of the sheer abundance of His mercy; He forgives because it is an act of *justice* to do so.

Now, there *is* an surprising and wonderful paradox in that idea. Do you see it? We normally think of justice as that attribute of God that demands for the punishment of sin. And it *is* that. Justice cries out for retribution whenever a wrong is done. Proverbs 11:21: "Be assured, an evil person will not go unpunished." Exodus 34:7: "[God] will by no means clear the guilty."

We understand this instinctively. It is *unjust* to let evil go unpunished. The truly righteous long for God to deal with evildoers. Listen to Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the Temple (2 Chronicles 6:23): "hear from heaven and act and judge your servants, repaying the guilty by bringing his conduct on his own head." According to Revelation 6:10, the souls of those martyred for their faith cry to God, "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"

And God *will* judge evil. We look forward to that day when the Judge of all the earth will judge the deeds of the wicked and purge evil from the universe. He will not compromise His own righteousness by allowing one sin to go unpunished. Jesus said, "nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known" (Matthew 10:26). Luke 12:3: "Whatever you have said in the dark shall be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in private rooms shall be proclaimed on the housetops." Every sin, even the secret ones, will be brought out in the open and judged. Justice screams for retribution of sin, and God is a God of perfect justice, so He will not let one sin go unpunished.

We tend to think about these things in a much too shallow way. We take God's mercy for granted and ignore His holy justice. But a right view of God will always exalt His righteous hatred for sin as much as it magnifies His love and mercy. God's mercy is not some maudlin sentiment that causes Him to forget about His holiness and set aside His righteous anger against sin. The demands of righteousness *must* be fully and completely satisfied if God is ever going to forgive sin. He

cannot and will not simply overlook sin as if it didn't really matter.

Yet he does forgive.

And to me, one of the most wonderful things about the gospel is that it explains how this is possible. Christ satisfied God's justice on behalf of those whom He saves. He bore the penalty of their sin when He died on the cross. The gospel declares "His *righteousness*: [so] that he might be [both] just, *and* the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus."

In other words, the gospel is not only a message about the love of God. It *is* that; but it is not *only* that. The true gospel magnifies His justice as much as it magnifies His love. But when was the last time you thought about the gospel as a message about divine justice?

We tend not to think in those terms. Invariably, when you hear the gospel presented these days, all the stress is on the *love* of God, and His righteous abhorrence of sin is rarely even mentioned. "*God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life.*" We love to talk about forgiveness, but rarely is there any attention given to the fact that God demanded payment for sin in *full*, and if that payment had not been made, there would never have been any forgiveness whatsoever. Hebrews 9:22—"without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins." The truth is that if God's *justice* had not been fully satisfied, our salvation would not be possible at all. We would be damned forever without any hope of mercy.

That's why the apostle John uses all this courtroom terminology. He is highlighting the fact that our salvation is grounded in the justice of God. Chapter 1 verse 9: "He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins." And look at our verse, verse 1 of chapter

2: "We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous."

Again, there's a marvelous paradox in this. We think of justice as that which screams for our punishment, but we learn from the gospel that God has made justice into something that *cries out for mercy*. That's really a profound thought when you think about it.

This is the very issue that opened Martin Luther's eyes to the gospel. He was studying Romans 1, and he could not get past verse 17. He read where Paul says that the gospel reveals the *righteousness* of God, and he was unable to go any further. He said it made him angry. He said he hated the apostle Paul for writing that verse, because the gospel is supposed to be *good* news. But Paul says it reveals the *righteousness* of God, and Luther could only think of righteousness as something that demanded the punishment of sinners.

But finally he realized that Paul was talking about a different aspect of divine righteousness. In fact, Paul was describing this very quality of divine justice that demands the salvation of believers. "As it is written, The just shall live by faith." And Luther said it was as if a window to heaven had been opened for him. He suddenly saw God's righteousness in a completely different light, and he came to love that very attribute of God which he had previously hated.

There's an important point in all of this: unless you see that the *justice* of God is as important as His mercy in obtaining your salvation, you will not love His righteousness the way you should. But if you understand that salvation not only fulfills divine mercy but also magnifies divine

righteousness, that fact will be a powerful deterrent to sin in your life.

Look at our verse again: "My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin."

And this morning I want to take you into the viewing gallery of heaven's hall of justice so that we can examine the paradox of divine justice up close. And I'll call your attention to three surprising features in this courtroom scene that are astonishing and wondrous. Here are three features that are not what we might expect to find in a scenario where the first concern is justice: The Advocate, the verdict, and the remedy for our sinfulness. Let's look at them individually. First,

#### 1. THE ADVOCATE

The advocate is Christ Himself. This is remarkable for several reasons. First of all, as I said at the outset, it is extraordinary to think of Christ in the role of our heavenly Advocate—interceding for us with God, arguing in our favor on the basis of divine *justice*. That is how He pleads our case. That is how He speaks on our behalf. He represents us before the throne of divine justice, and makes the case that justice itself demands our pardon. You could not get a better Advocate to plead your case.

The Greek word translated "advocate" is *parakletos*. It literally means "one called alongside." It has the idea of an intercessor on our behalf. It also can convey the notion of one who consoles—a *comforter*. As a matter of fact, it is the very same word used of the Holy Spirit in John 14:16, where Jesus promised to send the "Comforter," the *parakletos*—someone called alongside us to assist us. So the Holy Spirit indwells us as our *parakletos*

here on earth. Jesus intercedes for us as our *parakletos* in the very throne-room of God.

Now if you ever get hauled into court to answer any charges, one thing you will discover is that there is no more comforting presence in that courtroom than the attorney who speaks on your behalf. He sits next to you. He argues your case with more eloquence and authority than you would ever be able to muster on your own. He takes your side completely and without reservation. He is the friendliest face in the courtroom when he looks at you or speaks to you—and especially when he speaks to the court on your behalf. Most of all, he is the determined adversary of anyone who has brought charges against you. That is the very role Christ fulfills for us in heaven. Isn't that a wonderful truth?

I have been fortunate enough that in my whole life I have only once needed to hire an attorney to plead my case against an adversary. Someone had defrauded me; and deceived me into an unjust contractual agreement. The whole deal was fraudulent from the start, and the moment I complained that the terms of the contract had been misrepresented to me, this firm I was dealing arranged to have a threatening letter sent to me from a big New York law firm saying that if I made any attempt to get out of their contract, they would sue me and take away everything I owned—which at the time didn't amount to much, but it was frightening nonetheless. And I fussed around with the thing for several weeks. I wrote some pleading letters to the company—which did absolutely nothing to get their lawyers off my back. I lay awake several nights worrying about what would happen if this big New York law firm actually took



me to court, and I felt utterly helpless, powerless, and defenseless.

Finally I went to see an attorney someone recommended to me. This guy looked at the contract and listened to my story and agreed that I had been defrauded. All he did was write a very firmly-worded letter on my behalf back to the New York law firm. His letter was shorter and much less polite than all the letters I had already written to this company, but within 24 hours they released me from their contract, wrote me a letter of apology, and refunded virtually everything I had already paid them. In effect, they paid *me* money to drop the whole matter.

Why? Because that attorney spoke with authority. He knew the law better than I did. He dismantled my accusers' charges and turned the force of the law against them. And he used all that clout in my behalf. I was the beneficiary of his pleading on my behalf. And when the company that was committing the fraud wrote their letter of apology, it was *me* they addressed that letter to—not my advocate. They apologized to me, not to him. And it was amazing how they suddenly started treating me with respect, now that I had an advocate who knew the law.

And I'll tell you, I *liked* that lawyer. He charged me fifty dollars for writing one letter. It probably took him 15 minutes or less to do it. But I was never so happy to pay a guy fifty bucks in all my life. If you are ever in such a situation, you will never tell another lawyer joke as long as you live—that is, if you get the right advocate.

Well, there is no better advocate than Jesus Christ. There is no one who can argue more

powerfully or more persuasively. He never loses His cases.

And notice with whom He pleads. According to this verse, He is our advocate "with the Father." He pleads our case before the Father.

Now don't get the idea that our Advocate stands before a harsh and unwilling tribunal. He pleads with a loving Father. And in *this* courtroom, it is not only our Advocate who is kindly disposed toward us, but the Judge is on our side as well.

Some people imagine that Christ is sympathetic to us, but the Father is stern and unforgiving, and Christ must plead with Him in order to overcome His hostility against us—as if God were opposed to us and insisting on retribution. As if Christ must intercede desperately and urgently on our behalf to change the Father's attitude and overcome the heavenly Judge's hostility against our sin.

If that is the way you picture Christ's advocacy, get that idea out of your mind. In this heavenly court of justice, the Judge is already predisposed to forgive. He is as eager for our acquittal as our Advocate who defends us. In fact, it is He—the Father; the *Judge*—who sent the Son to become our Savior. First John 4:10: "This is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." So the Father and His Son, our advocate, are both inclined toward mercy. Psalm 130:7 says, "With the LORD there is steadfast love, and with him is plentiful redemption." The Psalmist prayed (in Psalm 86:5), "you, O Lord, are good and forgiving, abounding in steadfast love to all who call upon you." And in verse 15 he added, "you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness." Isaiah 55:7 says God "will abundantly pardon." Everywhere in

Scripture, God is portrayed as *eager* to forgive, *willing* to forgive, *not delighting* in the destruction of the wicked, but *pleading* with sinners to repent and be reconciled with Him.

The obstacle, viewed from our perspective, is justice. How is it just to forgive? The sacrifice of Christ answers that question (verse 2): "He is the propitiation for our sins." Chapter 1:7: "the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin."

But let's not get ahead of ourselves. It's fair to ask: If God loves us and is willing to be merciful to us, and Christ has paid the debt demanded by justice, why is it even necessary for someone to plead with the Father on our behalf? Why must the Son be our Advocate before the Father? Why do we need a heavenly advocate?

Because there is one who accuses us. Satan, who in Revelation 12:10 is called "the accuser of [the brethren]" is constantly bringing charges against us in the court of God. In fact, listen to that verse, Revelation 12:10. This describes the drama in heaven at the end of the age. The apostle John writes: "I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who *accuses them day and night before our God.*" Do you get that? Satan is constantly, nonstop, day and night—while you are sleeping as well as while you are awake—arguing the case against you before the judge of all the universe. Accusing you. Bringing the list of your transgressions before the throne of God. Demanding that you be punished for your wrongdoing. And his great aim is the destruction of your soul.

But Christ argues your case. And He does it not so that He can change the mind of the Judge—for the Judge is already willing to be merciful and forgiving toward you, if you are in Christ. But Christ pleads your case in order to answer the argument of the accuser. In order to quiet the one who speaks against you. In order to defeat and put to silence the great enemy of your soul.

Just as Satan pleads the case against you day and night, you have a tireless advocate who never stops championing your cause. And according to Hebrews 7:25, "he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them." He never rests. He never takes a recess. He is constantly answering the charges against you in a way that utterly overpowers and overwhelms the adversary and utterly silences his complaints.

And here's another remarkable thing about this heavenly advocate. He is the only defense attorney in the history of jurisprudence who will take your case *only* if you fully confess your guilt up front. If you try to *cover* your own guilt and refuse to confess that you are utterly and completely worthy of condemnation, then you cannot have Him as your advocate.

Look back at chapter 1. Verses 8-10:

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

10 If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

Before he will ever accept you as a client, you must bring your sins to light and confess them freely and fully to Him. Verse 6:

If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.

7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.

You must confess your guilt to Him, or He will not have you as a client.

So think about this: Every person whom this heavenly Advocate speaks for is *guilty* and has *already* confessed his or her guilt before the case ever comes before the judge.

And yet—and here's the most remarkable thing of all—this Master Attorney, this Advocate who pleads your case, never fails to win an acquittal.

And this is the second surprising feature of this passage I want you to see:

## 2. THE VERDICT

Here is one lawyer who never loses a case. No matter how guilty and sin-stained they are, His clients *never* face the judge's condemnation. "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). He has turned justice itself in our favor.

Again, it is divine justice, not an *injustice*, when we are acquitted. Verse 9 of chapter 1: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." He is our Advocate (2:1)—"Jesus Christ the righteous." The verdict? A full pardon. "God[, who] is light, and in [whom] is no darkness at all . . . is faithful and just to forgive us our sins."

So the verdict is immediate acquittal—and a full and free pardon from all our sins on the principles of justice alone, without compromising divine righteousness in the least. So in the end, the Judge is *both* "just, *and* the justifier of the one who believes in Jesus" (Romans 3:26). Isn't that an amazing turn of justice?

Now bear in mind why that is possible: Because the Advocate Himself has already paid the penalty of sin on our behalf. Verse 3: "He is the propitiation for our sins." We've talked about that word *propitiation* before. It means that Christ has fully satisfied justice, as well as the wrath of God, on our behalf. He has paid the full penalty of sin before our case was ever brought before the throne. In fact, it would be *unjust* if we were asked to pay the penalty a second time. And so Christ gains our acquittal by pleading that justice has already been served. The penalty is already paid in full. "He shows His wounded hands and names me as His own."

Who wouldn't want an Advocate like that?

Now I'm afraid this whole principle isn't stressed enough in our thinking, and it is rarely mentioned in what passes for preaching in most of the evangelical world today. As I said earlier, there's a lot of stress on the mercy and lovingkindness of God, and that is certainly an important principle. It was God's love that moved Him to give His own Son as a sacrifice for sins so that forgiveness would be possible.

But forgiveness would *not* be possible on the ground of love alone. God is a righteous Judge. He *cannot* simply turn His head and look away from our sin and act as if it never happened. He *cannot* overlook sin and pretend to be righteous while

ignoring unrighteousness. Something must be done about sin. There is a price to be paid. The principle of justice must be satisfied. If God simply ignored our sin, He would be an accessory after the fact. Justice would be fatally compromised. His own holiness would be discredited.

After all, God instantly condemned the devil and the angels who sinned by casting them out of heaven forever. He will one day bind them and cast them into the lake of fire, where they will reap the wages of their sin for all eternity. How could a God whose standards of justice are so high simply excuse the sin of humanity and exact no price for the sin of Adam and everyone who is in Adam?

Someone had to pay, and it had to be a *Man* who paid—a human being. Not only that, if a man were to pay the penalty of sin on behalf of others, it had to be a man who had no sins of his own to atone for. And for that very reason Christ became a man—the perfect man, perfect in righteousness, "holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens" according to Hebrews 7:26. And He paid an infinite price, suffering the full wrath of God against sin—the full equivalent of eternal torment in hell forever on behalf of multitudes who could never afford to pay such a high price themselves.

That is the true meaning of the cross. Christ suffered and died under the weight of a punishment that is inconceivable in human terms.

How did He pay that price? Was it by being flogged and spat upon and tortured and beaten by wicked, ruthless, merciless executioners? Well, yes—but it was not only that. The physical sufferings of the cross were only an infinitesimal fraction of the pain Christ suffered. The bleeding,

the thirst, the pain, the bones out of joint, the stinging whips and cruel nails may *appear* to be pain enough. Those things certainly gave Him more earthly pain than any man can reasonably be expected to bear.

But that alone would not have been enough to atone for sin. And in fact, the physical trauma was only a minuscule token of the real sufferings of Christ. As that earthly drama played out on a Roman cross, a far more severe kind of suffering was afflicting the soul of Christ in the spiritual realm. He received the full weight of divine wrath for all the sins of all His people of all time. God poured out His holy wrath against sin upon the person of His own Son.

Several centuries before the crucifixion event, the prophet Isaiah was given a glimpse of Christ's atoning work, and as he looked at the event prophetically, he saw the crucifixion from heaven's perspective, and this is what he wrote (Isaiah 53:10): "It was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief." Isaiah is telling us that God Himself punished Christ for our sins. Again in Isaiah's words: "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all." That's verse 6 of that same prophetic description of the cross in Isaiah 53.

Christ bore an infinite amount of punishment. He suffered more of the wrath of God than you would ever feel, even if you spent the rest of eternity in the torments of hell. And He did it to pay for the sins of everyone who would ever believe.

And having already suffered that much, He can now plead our case before God in perfect righteousness. He can be an Advocate before the



throne of divine justice on behalf of guilty, hopeless sinners, and He can gain their full acquittal, because justice has been completely satisfied through His perfect sacrifice.

That is an important truth to keep in mind as we consider the forgiveness of God. We live in a society where guilty criminals get off scot-free all the time. They get off on technicalities. They are acquitted by unjust judges and stupid juries and crooked lawyers. And we look at that with resentment, because it is a horrible miscarriage of justice.

But even Satan himself cannot complain of any injustice in the court of God, even though sinners are acquitted all the time. Because the price of justice has been satisfied and paid in full already.

So if you are in Christ, you have a perfect advocate with God the Father—Jesus Christ the righteous. You can go boldly before the throne of grace and be fully assured that you will find grace to help in time of need. You can live with full confidence that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. You can rest in the promise that you shall not come into condemnation; but have already passed from death unto life.

If you are not yet in Christ, or if you are unsure of your status with Him, I urge you to flee to Him for mercy even now, right where you sit. Confess your sin and do not try to excuse it or cover it up. Ask the Spirit of God to break your heart over your sin so that you can see it as God sees it—abhorrent, loathsome, and exceedingly sinful. You have God's own inviolable promise that if you confess that sin and seek His mercy He *will* forgive you—and He is both faithful and *just* to do so.

Now I want to turn your attention to a third remarkable feature of this passage. It is—

### 3. THE REMEDY

Christ's work has gained for us much more than merely an acquittal from our sin. "He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to *cleanse* us from all unrighteousness." This same principle of perfect justice that gains our pardon also has a built in remedy for our sinful tendencies. It gives us a motive not to sin. More than that. This remarkable justice does not merely gain us a not-guilty verdict in the courtroom of God. It also cleanses us from the stain of sin, enables us to overcome the love of sin, and gives us an incentive to keep from sinning.

Look at the opening phrase of our verse: "My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin."

This is an amazing aspect of John's argument. And in a way it is unfortunate that when the books of Scripture were divided into verses and chapters, someone decided to put a chapter break in here. Because this statement must be considered in the context of what has gone before.

In chapter 1, three times the apostle reminds us that we are guilty sinners and we must confess this. Verse 6: "If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth." Verse 8: "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." And verse 10: "If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us."

And verse 9 contains that familiar, lavish promise of full forgiveness: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins."

Now there have always been people who think the doctrine John sets forth here is hazardous to a holy walk. Even today, there are people who try to explain away the promise of free forgiveness. They think it is as a *disincentive* to holiness. And oddly enough, the people who hold such a view usually fall into some kind of perfectionism, where they teach that it is possible, if you exert enough effort and exercise enough willpower, that you can abstain from sin completely and attain a kind of perfection. And, you see, that turns John's message on its head, because anyone who thinks he has attained any degree of perfection is in the very situation John condemns in verse 8 of chapter 1, saying that they have no sin.

John's message is clear: We sin. We *all* sin. We sin often and we sin miserably. And we are to confess that to God.

But it is possible, and sometimes happens, that a carnal mind gets hold of this truth and thinks it can justify an unbroken continuance in sin. After all, if I *do* sin, and if God forgives sin, then why not just give it up, and sin as much as we can, so that grace may abound? Paul anticipated that very argument in Romans 6, and there he says it is an unthinkable position. "By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?"

Here the apostle John is saying the same thing. In fact, he says that these truths should keep us from sin. Far from thinking that the freeness of God's grace would ever lead a redeemed person into sin, he says the principle of free forgiveness is the very doctrine that should keep us *from* sin.

If you think free grace means license to sin, you need to examine yourself to see whether you are in the faith. The conscience revolts at such an abuse

of divine mercy, especially when we realize what a unthinkable cruel price Christ has paid for our sin. Shall we hate Him because He is kind to us? Shall we curse Him because He blesses us? What kind of monstrous culprit would use the *goodness* of God as an excuse to dishonor Him? Would we crucify Christ afresh and put him to an open shame? No one who truly loves Him and trusts Him would ever treat His lovingkindness with such wicked contempt.

The truth is that those of us who know Him—who benefit so immeasurably from His pleading before the throne of God on our behalf—need no nobler argument for holiness than the richness of His mercy to us.

He ever lives to make intercession for us. He is pleading our cause before the Father's throne at this very moment. If that does not move your heart with a passionate yearning to serve and honor Him with your life, then your heart is cold and dead, and that is the very sin you need to confess this day, so that He may forgive you and cleanse you from all unrighteousness.

I hope you will ponder these things carefully. Contemplate the amazing justice that provides forgiveness and cleansing. Let these truths penetrate your soul and set your heart ablaze with a zeal for His righteousness—the same righteousness that turns divine justice in your favor and gives you a right standing before the throne here and now—and guarantees you a full eternity of unimaginable blessing. There is no stronger argument for holiness than that.