

Christ, the Atoning Sacrifice

Devotional Reading: Isaiah 59:1-8

Background Scripture: 1 John 2:1-6; 4:7-21

Today's Scripture: 1 John 2:1-6; 4:9-17

I. The Source of New Life

1 John 2:1-2

¹ My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. ² He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

1. The author addresses readers as *children* often. The term suggests a close and affectionate connection between the writer and the original audience. This term might also hint that the readers are either younger or less mature in their spiritual journey than the writer.

2. Older versions of the Bible use the word *propitiation* rather than *atoning sacrifice*. The underlying ancient Greek word is rare in the New Testament. The noun forms appear exclusively here, in Romans 3:25, and 1 John 4:10 and refer to something that turns away wrath.

II. The Proof of New Life

1 John 2:3-6

³ We know that we have come to know him if we keep his commands.

⁴ Whoever says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person. ⁵ But if anyone obeys his word, love for God is

truly made complete in them. This is how we know we are in him: ⁶ Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did.

3. The author uses the verb translated *know* about two dozen times in the five short chapters of 1 John. These mostly affirm the Christian's confident faith in Christ and assurance of salvation. Here, the question is what assures us that Jesus is indeed our advocate and propitiation (atoning sacrifice) when we sin. The answer is that keeping Jesus' commandments is our proof. If Jesus is Savior, then he must also be Lord.

4. This verse restates and reinforces 1 John 1:6: "If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth." Some believers among John's original readers may have separated faith in Christ from obedience to Christ. Perhaps thinking their "good" spirits were completely separate from their "evil" bodies, they lived as if their actions had no bearing on their relationship to Christ. Nevertheless, the contents of a person's heart will eventually become apparent through their actions. Therefore, the writer completely rejects the idea that someone's actions would not align with the faith that they declare.

5. By contrast, our following Jesus' teaching expresses the effect of everything he has done. Jesus' death for sinners was the fullest expression of God's love for humanity, and Jesus' teaching instructs us how to express God's love to others (John 3:15; 1 John 3:16). This makes God's love for humanity our love for humanity. The ancient Greek word translated *made complete* can take various shades of meaning, depending on context. Here and elsewhere, the sense is that of a finished task because its goal has been achieved. The writer uses the word this way five times in his Gospel and four times in his first epistle.

6. To confess Christ means to obey Christ. To *live as Jesus did* is to follow his example (John 13:15).

The author fronts this conclusion by introducing a Greek word translated as "to live"; he uses this word 23 times in this letter. In doing so, he speaks of a close, ongoing connection. This image originated from Jesus as he compared his followers to branches connected to him as the vine (John 15:1-11). The author's linkage to Jesus' teachings clarifies that a believer cannot keep Jesus' commandments or follow in Jesus' footsteps through his or her own strength. Doing so is only feasible by remaining in Christ and letting God's Spirit produce fruit in and through the believer. This teaching applies to everyday life. Those who live in Jesus will inevitably live their life in ways reflecting his love and teaching. In the text between 1 John 2:6 and 4:9, the author continues to trace the theme of love as it applies to various situations.

III. Love in Action

1 John 4:9-12

⁹ This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live

through him. ¹⁰ This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. ¹¹ Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. ¹² No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

9. How can we fail but to see John 3:16 restated here? The supreme expression of God's love is demonstrated through the incarnation: the divine Son of God putting on human flesh to announce and deliver salvation personally. The description of Christ as the *one and only Son* emphasizes his uniqueness and value to the Father.

10a. An astute observation from years ago is that what is unique about the relationship between the true God and people is that pagan religions tell stories about humanity's search for god(s). In contrast, Christianity tells the story of God's search for us (Luke 19:10). Christ became incarnate in a world that had rebelled against God. His becoming human is an act of love, and his death on the cross brings that love to its fullest measure. "We love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19).

10b. John aims to convey to his audience that love is an action, not an empty term. He illustrates this by detailing how God demonstrated his love for the world: by becoming the propitiation (*atoning sacrifice*) for our sins. The declaration in this half-verse echoes what the apostle Paul wrote in Romans 5:8. see discussion of this word in commentary on 1 John 2:2.

11. This implication of the gospel is unmistakable. After receiving God's love, we must recognize our responsibility to love the same people God loves. We do not need to ask who our neighbor is when hearing the command to love

our neighbor (Luke 10:29). God loves all because Christ's death makes atonement available for all (1 John 2:2). God loves first and loves those who do not love him. And so must we who have received his love. Even our enemies are objects of God's love and so must be of ours.

12a. Many texts reflect the fact that God cannot be *seen* (examples: Exodus 33:20; John 1:18; 1 Timothy 6:16). But in Christ, God became a visible, physical human, so to see Christ was truly to see God.

12b. The imperative to *love one another* is so important that John uses that phrase five times in this letter. This command is a repeated part of Jesus' message and is stressed by others as well. As we love others, our actions make God visible to the world.

IV. Certainty of Knowledge

1 John 4:13-17

¹³ This is how we know that we live in him and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit. ¹⁴ And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. ¹⁵ If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God. ¹⁶ And so we know and rely on the love God has for us.

God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. ¹⁷ This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are like Jesus.

13. The presence of the Holy Spirit expresses a new reality. The Spirit's presence in us gives us the certainty that we are in Christ and he is in us. Christ's promise of the Spirit's presence is a fact for all who are Christians and can be a fact for all who are not yet Christians

(John 14:16-17; Romans 8:9-11; Ephesians 1:13; 1 John 3:24; etc.). The Holy Spirit's presence is God's presence. Life in the Spirit is the life of God's love, demonstrating and assuring that we belong to him through Christ's atoning death.

14. The beginning of this epistle is a stirring declaration that the incarnate Christ, seen by eyewitnesses, is the basis for the gospel message. In shorter form, the author now repeats that declaration. By using the word *we*, the author declared he had seen Jesus personally and, therefore, his testimony is that of an eyewitness. The mission of *his Son to be the Savior of the world* reinforces the same thought of John 3:17.

15. This verse is a summary statement of the plan of salvation. A doctrinal error often seen is to take such summary statements as being the entirety of that plan. For someone to acknowledge *that Jesus is the Son of God* is good as far as it goes. But remember that demons confess the same thing and are still lost (Mark 5:7; James 2:19). Spiritual maturity is required for understanding the entirety of that plan, which results in knowing how *God lives in a believer, and they in God*.

16. The author turns to the imperative of *love*. Christ's life, death, and resurrection fully demonstrate God's love. We can say without reservation that *God is love*. For us to confess Christ truly means that we love one another. Such love is found among all who genuinely experience the abiding unity with God brought by Christ. Without such love, our confession is empty. With it, our confession is complete.

17. This is the third time the writer has spoken of perfection with regard to *love*; he will continue to do so in the verse that follows this one. And again, Jesus is our model. These concepts are so foundational that they bear repeating!

Involvement Learning

Christ, the Atoning Sacrifice

Into the Lesson

List questions children ask that are difficult for adults to answer simply.

Some things are hard to explain or describe. The way we attempt to do so may indicate some things about what we believe. Today's lesson requires special attention to how the apostle John explains certain ideas and describes certain relationships.

Key Verse

This is love: not that we loved God,
but that he loved us and sent his Son
as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.
—1 John 4:10

Into the Word

Read 1 John 2:1-6. Give a response for each of the following categories:

Things both God and I know

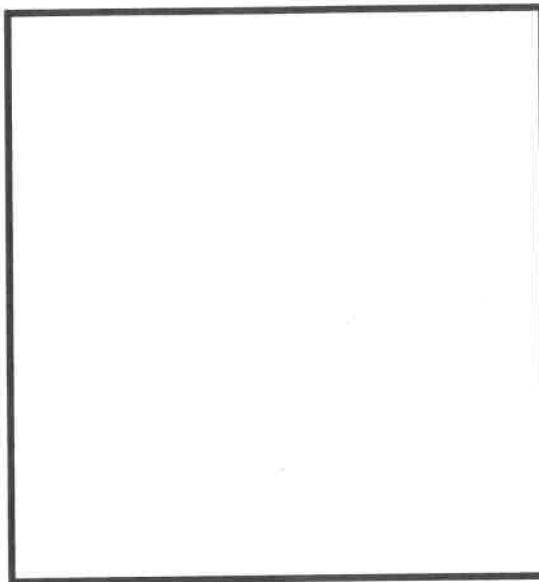
Things God knows that I don't know

Things I know that God doesn't know

Things that neither I nor God know

Read 1 John 4:9-12. In the space below, draw a visual representing the way these verses explain (1) the primary way the love of God has been demonstrated, (2) what that signifies for us, (3) how we

are to respond, and (4) how it is "perfected" or comes to completion.



Read 1 John 4:13-17, then write three things God has done: one thing each by the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Into Life

List three habits that Jesus practiced personally, according to 1 John 2:6. Think of practical ways you can adopt these same habits personally in the week ahead.

Thought to Remember

Christ's death for us moves us
to a life of love for others.