

1 John – Note 4

1 John 2:1-6

Why does John address his readers as “my little children”? In Greek and in that culture, this would not have been a patronizing put-down. It is, in fact, a term of great affection. They are children of John, because they came to faith under his ministry. He feels responsible for them. But he doesn't call them “my converts”. They are more important to him than that. So, while it might be alien in our culture for a pastor to refer to his church as “my little children”, he still ought to have the same sort of love and affection.

John then takes us into the courtroom. He reminds us that God is the Judge. He also reminds us that we are sinners. Firstly, he reminds us that it is our duty not to sin. But we have two words of comfort. The first is that John has already given us some help. He wrote us this letter, to help us not to sin. The second is that John knows that we are not perfect, and that, even if we are trying hard not to sin, we will sometimes fall into sin. So we have an Advocate. This is a type of lawyer. In America, we refer to Attorneys. In England and Wales, we have Solicitors and Barristers. But in Scotland, they have Advocates. He pleads in the defense of the guilty. What defense could Jesus give on our behalf? He pleads with His own blood. He has already paid the penalty for our sin, so that we do not have a case to answer.

Of course, there are some who will think this means that it doesn't matter if we sin, because God has already forgiven us through Jesus. It doesn't work like that, as John goes on to show. Wait till verse 3 for the answer to that one.

In verse 2, we have another legal term. Jesus is the *propitiation* for our sins. What does propitiation mean? It means a sacrifice. But it is not just any old sacrifice. It is the sort of sacrifice, which turns away anger. Have you ever been angry with someone, and then they do something above and beyond the call of duty to make it up to you, and that attitude changes your anger? That is what Jesus did for us. What is remarkable is that Jesus' actions turn away the anger of God against you and me!

Remember more terminology here. Jesus is God. The God who is being referred to is God the Father. So we are talking about God the Father as Judge and God the Son as Advocate and Propitiation. These are two of the three persons of the Trinity, which is One God, even though He is in three persons. Yes – I know it is difficult to get our heads around that, but the fact that it is not an obvious doctrine is an indication of why it is true. If you were making up a religion, you would never choose to make such a complicated idea. Mohammed didn't, when he invented Islam. Joseph Smith didn't when he invented Mormonism. Only the true nature of God would be so complex.

Verse 3 returns us to the concept of knowing God. It also asks how do we know that we know Him! It is not just “do you know Him?” but “do you know that you know Him?” Back to the question of doing what we like because Jesus has won our forgiveness. That is the wrong attitude. You see, this verse shows that if that is the way we feel, then we have never really known God. We only know God for sure if we keep His commandments.

So we can't say “It's OK to swear and cheat at high school or at college or university, because God has forgiven me.” If that is what we thought, then it would prove that we had never really repented and believed in Jesus. So, although we do not earn our salvation by obeying God's commandments, we do demonstrate our salvation by that method – or we demonstrate our lack of salvation by not doing. Does

that make sense? Indeed, John calls the sort of person who behaves like that “a liar”. John is again being really hard-hitting. This “letter of love”, as some people call it, is a really hard, masculine sort of love.

But verse 5 is a wonderful promise. It might be hard to keep God's commandments. But, John says that we begin to mature into them! Our character starts to change for the better! That is something to look forward to.

Finally, verse 6 reminds us that Jesus is also to be our example. Some people think that that's all Jesus is – a good example. We want to tell people that He is so much more. And that is true! But He is an example as well! So, we need to study what Jesus did in the Gospels. If you want to read a second passage of Scripture each day, then a good place to start would be to read through John's Gospel, because, as Adam pointed out on Facebook, there are a lot of parallels between John's teaching in this letter, and the way he reflects on the life of Jesus in his Gospel.