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Capitol Commission Bible Study
The Nature of Our Allegiance
1 John 2:1-8

Overcoming Sin - 2:1-2

Beginning in verse 1 of chapter 2, John shares the primary reason he wrote this letter. It was *that you may not sin*. There are two basic ways the word “sin” is used in the Bible. One is a reference to the sin nature which is part and parcel of human existence as a result of the Fall. This is an internal tendency to commit sins. The second use of the word relates to specific acts of disobedience against God. It is this second meaning that John is dealing with here. In this passage, he gives his readers the recipe for living a godly lifestyle by helping them discover how to commit sins less.

Still, John is aware that in spite of our best efforts, we will commit sins from time to time. But when we do, there is a way to deal with the problem. We have an *Advocate* – Jesus Christ – to represent us before the Father (the righteous judge).

John then gets more specific as to why Jesus is able to be our *Advocate*. When he willingly went to die on the cross, Christ became *the propitiation* (the atoning sacrifice) *for our sins*. In this act, he, the sinless one, took upon himself the penalty for sin which should have rested upon us (the guilty sinners). John goes on to say that the forgiveness Christ provided is for *the whole world*. The meaning is that everyone “potentially” qualifies for forgiveness. It is potential because no one is forced to receive it. Those who choose to receive it, though, actualize the forgiveness for their own lives, and are able to enter into a personal relationship with God.



The Connection Between Relationship and Obedience - 2:3-6

While people’s lifestyles are not the means of salvation, they are the indicator as to whether or not one actually has a personal relationship with God. In verses 3 and 4, John says that *By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments*, and that *one who claims to know Christ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar*. The basic foundation of biblical belief is found in a relationship, not merely in good works. The works are only the outward evidence of the relationship.

Then, in verses 5-6, John reverts back to the positive side of his point and says that those who joyfully express *agape* (sacrificial) love in life, know him in that relationship. And when they live in that relationship, *the love of God has truly been perfected* in them.

The Nature of God’s Commands - 2:7-8

In verse 7, John says: *Beloved, I am not writing a new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning*. The fact that a competing belief (Gnosticism) was now before them should make them carefully compare the old with the new. He explains that *the old commandment* (salvation by faith) *is the word which you have heard*. The “new commandment” of the Gnostics was salvation by knowledge. His point is that it is the old one that represents the truth.

In verse 8, John changes the subject when he says: *On the other hand, I am writing a new commandment to you*. Previously he was talking about the gospel message itself. Now he turns his attention to the application of their religious faith in daily life. The “new commandment” was an admonition for them to live their Christian faith based on love – as opposed to the legalism of their former religion. As such, John told his readers that the truth lived out by Jesus in his life is possible also *in you*. He said this to convey what kind of love should be expressed in our lives. The *true light* which *is already shining*, and is spoken of in this verse, is Jesus Christ. His life is a light shining in our lives to root out and eliminate the darkness of sin.

Why This Passage is Important Today

The great problem of mankind is not that we don’t know enough, but that by our acts of disobedience to God we put ourselves into a position of separation from him. God provided a way to solve that problem by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. When we accept that, we are not simply accepting an intellectual precept or looking to experience some spiritual feelings. We are, literally, shifting our allegiance from self-interest to God’s interest. It is a complete change of heart which is expressed in a new motivation to live our lives for his glory, and to accomplish his purpose in the world by our lives.