

1 John 2:2

by A.W. Pink

The passage 1 John 2:2 is often misunderstood, but it actually teaches that Christ died for the sins of believers, both Jewish and Gentile, and that the Atonement is not a failure.

Scripture: Isaiah 53:11, Isaiah 64:10, John 11:51-52, Romans 1:8, Romans 3:25, Galatians 2:9, Colossians 1:5-6, Hebrews 2:17, 1 John 2:2, Revelation 12:9

Topics: "Assurance of Salvation", "Atonement"

Description

A.W. Pink examines 1 John 2:2, arguing against the interpretation that Christ's propitiation is universal for all humanity. He emphasizes that the verse is specifically addressing believers, particularly Jewish believers, and that the term 'whole world' refers to Gentile believers as well. Pink asserts that the atonement is effective and not a failure, as it is designed to accomplish God's purpose without ambiguity. He warns against the implications of a universal atonement that could undermine the assurance of salvation for believers. Ultimately, Pink calls for a return to the biblical understanding of Christ's propitiation as limited to those who have faith.

Transcript

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Arthur W. Pink

THERE is one passage more than any other which is I appealed to by those who believe in universal redemption, and which at first sight appears to teach that Christ died for the whole human race. We have therefore decided to give it a detailed examination and exposition. "And He is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:2). This is the passage which, apparently, most favors the Arminian view of the Atonement, yet if it be considered attentively it will be seen that it does so only in appearance, and not in reality.

Below we offer a number of conclusive proofs to show that this verse does not teach that Christ has propitiated God on behalf of all the sins of all men. In the first place, the fact that this verse opens with "and" necessarily links it with what has gone before. We, therefore, give a literal word for word translation of 1 John 2 :1 from Bagster's Interlinear: "Little children my, these things I write to you, that ye may not sin; and if any one should sin, a Paraclete we have with the Father, Jesus Christ (the) righteous".

It will thus be seen that the apostle John is here writing to and about the saints of God. His immediate purpose was two-fold: first, to communicate a message that would keep God's children from sinning; second, to supply comfort and assurance to those who might sin, and, in consequence, be cast down and fearful that the issue would prove fatal. He, therefore, makes known to them the provision which God has made for just such an emergency. This we find at the end of verse 1 and throughout verse 2.

The ground of comfort is twofold: let the downcast and repentant believer (1 John 1:9) be assured that, first, he has an "Advocate with the Father"; second, that this Advocate is "the propitiation for our sins" Now believers only may take comfort from this, for they alone have an "Advocate", for them alone is Christ the propitiation, as is proven by linking the Propitiation ("and") with "the Advocate"! In the second place, if other passages in the New Testament which speak of "propitiation," he compared with 1 John 2:2, it will be found that it is strictly limited in its scope.

For example, in Romans 3 :25 we read that God set forth Christ "a propitiation through faith in His blood". If Christ is a propitiation "through faith", then He is not a "propitiation" to those who have no faith! Again, in Hebrews 2:17 we read, "To make propitiation for the sins of the people." (Heb. 2:17, R. V.) In the third place, who are meant when John says, "He is the propitiation for our sins"? We answer, Jewish believers. And a part of the proof on which we base this assertion we now submit to the careful attention of the reader.

In Galatians 2:9 we are told that John, together with James and Cephas, were apostles "unto the circumcision" (i.e. Israel). In keeping with this, the Epistle of James is addressed to "the twelve tribes, which are scattered abroad" (1:1). So, the first Epistle of Peter is addressed to "the elect who are sojourners of the Dispersion" (1 Pet. 1:1, R. V.). And John also is writing to saved Israelites, but for saved Jews and saved Gentiles. Some of the evidences that John is writing to saved Jews are as follows. (a) In the opening verse he says of Christ, "Which we have seen with our eyes . . . and our hands have handled".

How impossible it would have been for the Apostle Paul to have commenced any of his epistles to Gentile saints with such language! (b) "Brethren, I write no new commandment unto you, but an old commandment which ye had from the beginning" (1 John 2:7). The "beginning" here referred to is the beginning of the public manifestation of Christ-in proof compare 1:1 ; 2:13, etc. Now these believers the apostle tells us, had the "old commandment" from the beginning. This was true of Jewish believers, but it was not true of Gentile believers. (c) "I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known Him from the beginning" (2:13).

Here, again, it is evident that it is Jewish believers that are in view. (d) "Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that Antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time. They went out from us, but they were not of us" (2:18, 19). These brethren to whom John wrote had "heard" from Christ Himself that Antichrist should come (see Matthew 24). The "many antichrists" whom John declares "went out from us" were all Jews, for during the first century none but a Jew posed as the Messiah.

Therefore, when John says "He is the propitiation for our sins" he can only mean for the sins of Jewish believers.* In the fourth place, when John added, "And not for ours only, but also for the whole world", he signified that Christ was the propitiation for the sins of Gentile believers too, for, as previously shown, "the world" is a term contrasted from Israel. This interpretation is unequivocally established by a careful

comparison of 1 John 2:2 with John 11:51, 52, which is a strictly parallel passage: "And this spake he not of himself: but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation; And not for that nation only, but that also He should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad".

Here Caiaphas, under inspiration, made known for whom Jesus should "die". Notice now the correspondency of his prophecy with this declaration of John's: "He is the propitiation for our (believing Israelites) sins." "He prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation." "And not for ours only." "And not for that nation only." "But also for the whole world"-That is, Gentile believers scattered throughout the earth. "He should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad."

In the fifth place, the above interpretation is confirmed by the fact that no other is consistent or intelligible. If the "whole world" signifies the whole human race, then the first clause and the "also" in the second clause are absolutely meaningless. If Christ is the propitiation for every-body, it would be idle tautology to say, first, "He is the propitiation for our sins and also for everybody". There could be no "also" if He is the propitiation for the entire human family.

Had the apostle meant to affirm that Christ is a universal propitiation he had omitted the first clause of verse 2, and simply said, "He is the propitiation for the sins of the whole world." Confirmatory of "not for ours (Jewish believers) only, but also for the whole world"-Gentile believers, too; compare John 10:16; 17:20. In the sixth place, our definition of "the whole world" is in perfect accord with other passages in the New Testament. For example: "Whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the Gospel; which is come unto you, as it is in all the world" (Col. 1:5,6).

Does "all the world" here mean, absolutely and unqualifiedly, all mankind? Had all the human family heard the Gospel? No; the apostle's obvious meaning is that, the Gospel, instead of being confined to the land of Judea, had gone abroad, without restraint, into Gentile lands. So in Romans 1:8: "First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world". The apostle is here referring to the faith of these Roman saints being spoken of in a way of commendation.

But certainly all mankind did not so speak of their faith! It was the whole world of believers that he was referring to! In Revelation 12:9 we read of Satan "which deceiveth the whole world". But again this expression cannot be understood as a universal one, for Matthew 24 :24 tells us that Satan does not and cannot "deceive" God's elect. Here it is "the whole world" of unbelievers. In the seventh place, to insist that "the whole world" in 1 John 2:2 signifies the entire human race is to undermine the very foundations of our faith.

If Christ is the propitiation for those that are lost equally as much as for those that are saved, then what assurance have we that believers too may not be lost? If Christ is the propitiation for those now in hell, what guarantee have I that I may not end in hell? The blood-shedding of the incarnate Son of God is the only thing which can keep any one out of hell, and if many for whom that precious blood made propitiation are now in the awful place of the damned, then may not that blood prove inefficacious for me!

Away with such a God-dishonoring thought. However men may quibble and wrest the Scriptures, one thing is certain: The Atonement is no failure. God will not allow that precious and costly sacrifice to fail in accomplishing, completely, that which it was designed to effect. Not a drop of that holy blood was shed in vain. In the last great Day there shall stand forth no disappointed and defeated Saviour, but One who "shall see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied" (Isa. 53:11).

These are not our words, but the infallible assertion of Him who declares, "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure" (Isa. 64:10). Upon this impregnable rock we take our stand. Let others rest on the sands of human speculation and twentieth-century theorizing if they wish. That is their business. But to God they will yet have to render an account. For our part we had rather be railed at as a narrow-minded, out-of-date, hyper-Calvinist, than be found repudiating God's truth by reducing the Divinely-efficacious atonement to a mere fiction.

* It is true that many things in John's Epistle apply equally to believing Jews and believing Gentiles. Christ is the Advocate of the one, as much as of the other. The same may be said of many things in the Epistle of James which is also a catholic, or general epistle, though expressly addressed to the twelve tribes scattered abroad.

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