

Exegetical Analysis – 1 John 2:1-2

1-2 – My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; [2] and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world. (1. Τεκνία μου, ταῦτα γράφω ὑμῖν ἵνα μὴ ἀμάρτητε. καὶ ἐάν τις ἀμάρτη παράκλητον ἔχομεν πρὸς τὸν πατέρα Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν δίκαιον· 2. καὶ αὐτὸς ἱλάσμος ἐστὶν περὶ τῶν ἀμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν, οὐ περὶ τῶν ἡμετέρων δὲ μόνον ἀλλὰ καὶ περὶ ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου)

From the text of scripture the first thing we need to do is evaluate who is the audience of the letter, before we start making any conclusions.

A.W. Pink in "The Atoning Sacrifice of Christ" lays out several evidences of who the audience of 1 John is...

(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" (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 Mat 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 he says "He is the propitiation for our sins," he can only mean for the sins of Jewish believers.

As Pink concludes the letter is written to Jewish believers based upon his 4-evidences.

In (Vs.2) we must reconcile "our sins" with the Little Children of (Vs.1) and we know the Little Children are Jewish Believers.

"And he is the propitiation for our sins... For the sins of us who now believe, and are Jews."
—— John Gill, John Gill's Exposition of the Whole Bible, Commentary on 1 John 2:2.

Now we must define what propitiation means in the context of the passage.

Propitiation - (Webster's 1828 Dictionary):

PROPITIATION, n. propisia'shon.

1. The act of appeasing wrath and conciliating the favor of an offended person; the act of making propitious.

2. In theology, the atonement or atoning sacrifice offered to God to assuage his wrath and render him propitious to sinners. Christ is the propitiation for the sins of men. Rom 3. 1 John 2

Propitiation (Easton's Bible Dictionary):

In 1 John 2:2; 4:10, Christ is called the "propitiation for our sins." Here a different Greek word is used (hilasmos). Christ is "the propitiation," because by his becoming our substitute and assuming our obligations he expiated our guilt, covered it, by the vicarious punishment which he endured. (Comp. Heb. 2:17, where the expression "make reconciliation" of the A.V. is more correctly in the R.V. "make propitiation.")

"Propitiation is something done to a person: Christ propitiated God in the sense that he turned God's wrath away from

guilty sinners by enduring that wrath himself in the isolation of Calvary.”

—— Leon Morris, *The Atonement*, 1983.

From our biblical definitions of propitiation or (hilasmos) ἱλασμός it is clear that Christ is the propitiation because he became a substitute for us and appeased the wrath of God for “our sins” the immediate Jewish believers of the context. Hilasmos means to cover, so Jesus covered the sin of FIRST those who are Jewish Believers. God has been appeased, through the act of propitiation.

The next thing we need to evaluate is Expiation as it is closely linked to Propitiation.

“Expiation is the act that results in the change of God’s disposition toward us. It is what Christ did on the cross, and the result of Christ’s work of expiation is propitiation—God’s anger is turned away.”

—— Ligonier Ministries Website

“Expiation is what is done to crimes or sins or evil deeds: Jesus provided the means to cancel or cleanse them.”

—— Leon Morris, *The Atonement*, 1983.

“Expiation means “to cover sin” and/or “to cleanse sin.” Expiation reflects the idea that the negative and degrading effects of our sin are removed through the grace of God.”

—— Got Questions Website

Jesus provided the means to cancel the debt and to cleanse sin. Propitiation is intertwined with Expiation (although they do not mean exactly the same thing). Jesus propitiated and appeases the wrath of God for the believers. Jesus does not appease the wrath of God for the non-believer. The wrath of God still abides on the non-believer.

John 3:36 NASB

He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.”

So, to summarize up until now the two terms.

Jesus propitiates (appeases the wrath of God) for the sins of the Jewish believers, and through his appeasement he expiates (cleanses the sin) of the Jewish believer. This helps us understand the first part of the clause.

Now, it is important to exegete the second part of 1 John 2:2 to understand who the “but also for those of the whole world.”

Who are these people? Dr. Phil Johnson in his analysis of the passage compares John 11:51-52 to help us see that the “whole world” reflects the nations that surround the Jewish Nation.

John 11:51-52 NASB

Now he did not say this on his own initiative, but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus was going to die for the nation, [52] and not for the nation only, but in order that He might also gather together into one the children of God who are scattered abroad.

“There is little doubt that this is how John’s initial audience would have understood this expression. “The whole world” means “people of all kinds, including Jews, Gentiles, Greeks, Romans, and whatnot” as opposed to “ours only” i.e., the Jewish nation.”

—— Website Reference: http://www.reformationtheology.com/2005/10/understanding_1_john_22_by_pas.php

The Geneva Study Bible also recognizes the second clause of (vs.2) to refer to the nations outside of the Jewish Believers.

“For men of all sorts, of all ages, and all places, so that this benefit being not to the Jews only, of whom he speaks as appears in (1 John 2:7) but also to other nations.”

John Gill also in his commentary makes the same comment that the “whole world” is a reference to those outside of the Jewish Nation.

“but also for the sins of the whole world; the Syriac version renders it, “not for us only, but also for the whole world”; that is, not for the Jews only, for John was a Jew, and so were those he wrote unto, but for the Gentiles also. Nothing is more

common in Jewish writings than to call the Gentiles עולם, "the world"; and כל העולם, "the whole world"; and אומות העולם, "the nations of the world"

So, we can now make an exegetical summary of the verse in question.

1 John 2:2 NASB

[2] and He [Jesus] Himself is the propitiation [the appeasement of the wrath of God] for our [Jewish Believers] sins; and not for ours [Jewish Believers] only, but also for those of the whole world [Gentile Nations].

Nothing in this passage teaches that Jesus appeased the wrath of God for the non-elect, or that Jesus cleanses the sin of the non-elect. Jesus' blood is reserved for the elect.

1 John 2:2

"And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world" (1Jo 2:2). This is the passage which, apparently, most favors the view we are now rebutting, and 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 (1Jo 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" be 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, 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. 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" (1Pe 1:1, R.V.). And John also is writing to saved Israelites.

Evidences that John is writing to saved Jews are:

(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" (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 Mat 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 he 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 the 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 correspondence 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 who are 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 be the propitiation for everybody, it would be idle tautology[6] to say, first, He is the propitiation for our sins and also for everybody. There could be no "also" if He be 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."

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 be 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 be 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!

—— A.W. Pink, The Atoning Sacrifice of Christ.