

## JESUS IS MY LAWYER

### *A Sermon on 1 John 2:1-2*

by Robert Barnes

---

*(AP, Dateline February 11, 2003)*

*"Man Tells Judge He Wants Jesus As Lawyer"*

*A southwest Missouri man can have Jesus Christ as his attorney, but only one licensed to practice Missouri law will be allowed to speak for him during trial on charges he tampered with a judge.*

*Adams, whose age was not available, requested Jesus Christ as his trial attorney during a hearing Wednesday. He listed "Christian brother" Lee Constance of Alton as co-counsel. Constance is not licensed to practice law in Missouri.*

*Ozark County Circuit Judge John Moody told Adams it was fine for Jesus Christ to be his chief counsel, but no one including Constance could speak for him in the courtroom unless a lawful attorney.*

*Adams explained that his choice of lawyers was "religious in nature."*

We have just such a decision to make for ourselves today—on whether we will enjoy the benefits of Jesus being our advocate, our helper, our lawyer, or not.

My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense--Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:1-2).

My wife doesn't have any problem with viewing Jesus as a lawyer, partially because she loves legal shows on TV. *The Practice* and *Law and Order* are two of her favorites. What's interesting about these is that the lawyers are not at all committed to the truth. Their commitment is to their defendant—not to justice. And so they are racked with pangs of conscience as they defend murderers who they know will kill again, yet they get them set free on technicalities. So the blood of innocent victims is on their hands as they rise to the top of their profession. Thus, everyone on the show is filled with angst and that makes for good TV.

The Apostle John wasn't thinking of Jesus being a lawyer in the negative sense, though. But he did know that his audience would understand and appreciate his legal language due to their situation.

The historical context of my text today is that the Apostle John is writing to a church that is “with schism rent asunder” over doctrinal issues. Such questions of sin and truth and relationships and church discipline—these were not theoretical matters, but were practical because you would come to church and a certain family would be missing, or a certain pastor would be on permanent vacation.

Who has ever been in a situation when a church goes through severe doctrinal crisis? There are charges, counter-charges, there are people doing an end run around due process by mass emails or letters or gossip-rings—With church discipline such a vibrant issue and church court being held so often in this little church, it’s not unusual that John would use legal illustrations in this little epistle.

It’s also not unusual that John would use legal language, period. He’s the only writer in the New Testament to use this sort of language that we find in our text today, 1 John 2.

There are two issues to deal with before we get to the focus of the text. First, the phrase “one who speaks to the Father in our defense” is just one small word, “advocate” in some of your translations, but in the Greek, it’s the word *parakletos*.

The “advocate” here is the same word John uses his Gospel to mean “comforter”. It describes the ministry of the Holy Spirit in John 14, saying— “And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper (comforter/*parakletos*), that He may abide with you forever.” The implication is that Jesus the chief counsel is sending the Holy Spirit, your appointed Co-counsel, to care for your needs after he goes to heaven.

Here in 1 John, the word could mean so much more. A helper, a supporter and above all a witness in someone’s favor, an advocate is someone’s defense. The word has also been defined as someone who lends his presence to his friends. In a military style court-martial the officer who defends the soldier under accusation is called the prisoner’s friend. Jesus is our friend, in this legal sense.

Here in 1 John 2, this word *parakletos* could be making reference to another process not so legal—to covenant representation. Abraham and Moses and David and the prophets all presented their people to God and represented God’s interests to their people. They made their people aware of the consequences of breaking covenant with God, they pleaded for repentance, but when the time came, they even actively participated in God’s just discipline on His covenant people.

Now, it’s bad preaching to try and squash every bit of meaning that a word can possibly have into every instance of its use—and I’m not going to do that today. Since *parakletos* is being used by John in a context that is different than his use in his Gospel, and the necessary involvement of the local church courts to resolve this heresy problem that John’s audience was dealing with, these factors lead me to believe that John intended this powerful word to be understood legally and relationally.

There’s one more thing to get out of the way before we can pay attention to the points of application of these verses.

Notice verse 2—He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

Our Arminian brothers and sisters want to make this their life verse, but if they take this “whole world” in the way that they would like to, it argues too much—you end up with universalism, not unlimited atonement. And they don’t want that any more than we do. God bless them for the wise, biblical limits they place on the atonement.

When John says that Jesus is the *hilasmos* (propitiation, atoning sacrifice) for our sins, he is clearly making reference to Jesus' work of settling the sin debt that we owed to God. Jesus is the person through which guilt for past sin and defilement from present sin is removed. But the question is one of scope—has Jesus done this for all people, or people all over the world?

From John's perspective, this happened not just for his original audience, but for the whole world! The Bible, and the NT see salvation from God as being for the whole world. "For God so loved the world" (John 3:16). Jesus is confident that if he is lifted up, he will draw all men to himself (John 12:32) God will have all men to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4). That means that we can boldly take the Gospel to the Hispanic community, knowing that Jesus died for our amigos there. Did he die for every one of them? No, the Bible doesn't teach that, though if you isolated this phrase from the surrounding verses and the whole teaching of John you might think so. But John reports Jesus as saying in John 10, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." Then in vs. 15, "Just as the Father knows me and I know the Father--and I lay down my life for the sheep."

Taken in context, John is not teaching universalism, that everyone in the world has had their sin-debt removed by Jesus' sacrifice, and therefore all will go to heaven. But he is teaching that Jesus' saving power extends from a bunch of Jews in Jerusalem, to Judea, to half-breeds in Samaria, all the way down to Lake County on 50, it then takes a left on East Ave, until it finds a bunch of sinners who need him meeting in a borrowed church building. Amen? Jesus died for people all over the world, and the most remarkable thing is that he died for undeserving people like us.

Having dealt with the two more puzzling questions this text raises, let's break this first verse of chapter two down and make it very simple: Don't sin. If you do, you'll lose fellowship with God and with man. But if you do, Jesus didn't just die for you and then leave you alone. Jesus has never lost interest in you. He speaks to His Father on your behalf. He did not simply live a perfect life and die on the cross for your sins. He still bears your burdens on his heart. He is still talking to God about you and for you. He is still pleading your case, still praying for your continued sanctification and your eventual glorification.

Notice I'm using the word "fellowship" to describe what Jesus' advocacy for us effects—this not be confused with relationship. We enter into "relationship" with God when we are born again. For the purpose of this sermon, we have "fellowship" with God when we walk with God after being born again. Earlier in 1 John, we noticed that coming to Christ, does not reduce our sense of sin, but makes us even more aware that we are sinners. The Senior Citizen apostle knows the power of God's Word to defend his people against the attacks of the enemy and to inspire them to holy living. But there's something standing in John's way from accomplishing his task, and that person is, in my case, Robert Barnes.

The problem with believing what John says here and acting as if it is true is that we'd rather do anything than admit we are sinners. And second only to that is we hate to ask anyone for help. And both of those are put forth here in this text as the means of walking in close fellowship with God.

I met Jerry Bridges at a Ligonier conference many years ago. He wrote something years ago in his book *The Pursuit of Holiness*: "One day as I was reading the second chapter of 1 John, I realized that my personal life's objective regarding holiness was less than that of John's. He was saying, in effect, 'Make it your aim not to sin'. As I thought about this, I realized that deep within my heart my real aim was not to sin 'very much'--can you imagine a soldier going into battle with the aim of 'not getting hit very much?'"

So if we downplay sin, if we change our goals relating to it, then it becomes more manageable. We don't need Jesus' help if sin is not such a big deal. But John is not going to let you do that and neither am I. 1 John 2:1 says, "My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin (much)." Right? No, John's approach to sin is that of our Lord, who told us to be perfect as God the Father was perfect.

And if sin is this bad, we've got to stop it. And we've got to repent. And verse two tells us about what goes on in heaven when we do sin. But that doesn't appeal to our human nature much, either. We'd rather take things into our own hands.

Perhaps we'd rather self-atone for our sin. We'll sin and get depressed. We'll sin and stop (or start) going to church. We'll sin and eat too much. Anything but treat sin the way the Bible does—take it to Jesus.

Or perhaps we'd rather hire another lawyer. Perhaps we'll make a pastor or a priest our means of contacting God. Perhaps if we get into big trouble, we'll go to someone and say, "Will you please pray for me, I've sinned, and I need God's blessing." I'm ok with talking to people about your sin, but let's not make people or institutions the way we reestablish broken fellowship with God. We have fellowship with God through Jesus Christ—alone!

Jesus is our lawyer. He is the means by which we have a relationship with God and His intercession is the means by which we maintain fellowship with God. And these two points in these two verses strike at our desire to hide the evidence and be our own lawyer. But that's not how it works because the judge, in this case, is not stupid. God sees our legal tricks—we can wipe our fingerprints off the weapon as much as we want, God saw us do it. And only Jesus Christ can atone for your sins, only Jesus Christ can take our slimy, self-serving repentance and turn it into a holy prayer, worthy of ascending before the Father's throne.

I'm getting to know you folks a little better, and let me tell you, some of you need a good lawyer. My neighbor Paul sent me a story last week, and I made is a poem of sorts, and I'd like to pass it on to you as I close.

<p>Earth came to the end. The first thing I remember Was sitting upon a seat.</p> <p>After waiting and waiting, The chamber opened And what my two eyes did meet!</p> <p>As I looked around I saw a man in a tie. He was a villainous looking gent.</p> <p>He resembled ever other Lawyer I knew With horns, a tail and a scent.</p> <p>To my left was my Attorney, a kind and gentle man So familiar to me I knew Him, and yet His Name I could not understand.</p> <p>The doors flew open There appeared the Judge Appearing in full command.</p> <p>His presence was awesome As He crossed the room. He sat and said, "Let's being."</p> <p>The prosecutor arose "I am the Accuser, Why is this man not in hell?"</p> <p>My lies, my cheats And all of my sins Not one did he fail to tell.</p>	<p>Embarrassed, angry, hurt, and ashamed. My chances at winning were not looking swell.</p> <p>My defense against Satan By my quiet Attorney Seemed utterly doomed to fail.</p> <p>Satan finished with fury "This man comes with me!" And he sat with a smile and a smirk.</p> <p>I knew it was over. My Attorney did, too. We were both just staring at dirt.</p> <p>But then my Attorney stood up And he asked the Judge "May I approach the chair?"</p> <p>Over much strong objection He stood and he walked With poise and now-obvious flare.</p> <p>Everything seemed to change, I then understood, My Attorney was no man like me.</p> <p>He was God the Son, Approaching His Father, And the Devil was soon to flee.</p> <p>He stopped at the bench And said with a smile, "Dad, the devil is right."</p> <p>"This man is a jerk A fiend and a liar And the wages of sin are not light."</p>	<p>"But my death on the cross is more than enough to cover the sins of his life."</p> <p>"All of his days I continued to plead I've been a part of his case.</p> <p>But there is nothing else To do or to say For I was condemned in his place.</p> <p>The Judge thought for a moment And lifted his hand And slammed the gavel down</p> <p>"This man is free His debt has been paid And from Satan, I'll not hear a sound."</p> <p>The Lord led me away, And the doors opened wide Revealing my heavenly home.</p> <p>And I owed it all to the oddest of all I've ever seen or heard</p> <p>A lawyer who worked Without a fee And a sinner with Sentence interred.</p> <p><i>Robert Barnes</i></p>
--	---	---

Depend on Christ, and on nothing or no one else, to argue your case before God. Perhaps if you die tonight and stand before God and he asks you, "Why should I let you into my heaven?" the best thing you can do is plead the 5<sup>th</sup> and let your Counsel, your Advocate, speak for you. We should all be so wise as to be silent and let Jesus do the talking when it comes to justifying our place before God's throne.

Let us pray.