

Fresh Starts

1 John 1:1-2:2 (April 11, 2021)

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We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—²this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us—³we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. ⁴We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

⁵This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. ⁶If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; ⁷but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. ⁸If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

2My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; ²and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

Historical Context

Sometimes we think of the first century as a kind of “honeymoon” period for early Christianity. However, texts like 1 John bear witness to the first century of Christianity also as a time of strife and the splitting of some Christian communities over differences. We have meager evidence to be sure about what happened to the community that received this letter, but from the text it seems that some dissenters split off due to disagreements about the person of Jesus and the nature of the Christian life. These dissenters denied that Jesus was really human.

Theme: Fresh Starts

This passage gives bad news alongside good news. The bad news: There is a persistent brokenness to the human experience. Sin exists, sin is real, and as humans, we take part. (If we say that’s not the case, we’re deceiving ourselves). The Greek word for sin, *hamartia*, is the same word used when the archer misses his target. Each time you read “sins” in the text, the Greek sense is “misses.” “Misses” in terms of our choices, our words, and our actions are inevitable because humans are not perfect; only God is perfect.

The good news: when we confess our sin—own up to it, acknowledge it, realize it—we gain, not only forgiveness, but a fresh start: we are cleansed. And this is all attributed to God’s faithfulness as well as God’s justice.

That word “advocate” is also found in the fourth gospel, where it refers to the Spirit. The roots of the word in Greek describe one who comes alongside, calling, entreating. And this advocate is unique in that he also serves the function of atoning sacrifice—the one whose actions bring together what was fragmented, the one who brings about “at-one-ment” between God and humanity.