

# The Last Eyewitness, III

*Progressive Failures (1 John 2:1-11)*

October 12, 2003

## MY DEAR CHILDREN

We're going to take our passage today in four bites:

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 NIV

Addressing his readers as dear children reveals John's paternal devotion and it reflects his old age as he writes.

Q: Do you know who his "dear children" were?

Scholars believe that late in life John based his ministry in Ephesus and helped administer church affairs in the surrounding region of Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey).

In his book of Revelation (written about the same time) John named seven churches. Some have wondered if there's a veiled significance behind the names or the order of these churches.

- There is - but it's not very exciting in a *Left Behind* sort of way.
- Look at this map of Turkey, as I read them in order. (*Rev. 2-3*)

Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea.

- This is John's travel route to the churches he oversaw.
- These people are most likely John's "dear children."

Then John does a balancing act: last week we read his emphasis on God's faithfulness to us; to forgive us and to purify us.

Now he wants to ensure that we don't take that as a license to sin: "I write this to you so that you will not sin."

The sacrificial love of Christ that provides full forgiveness and free salvation, should by all rights, lead us to hate sin.

## OUR ADVOCATE

But he knows we're human – and we will do that which we hate.

But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense –  
Jesus Christ ... – 1 John 2:1 NIV

Here's a theology test. Three questions; shout out your answers. It's easy ... all three answers are "The Lord".

- Q: Who do you sin against?
- Q: Who is your final judge?
- Q: Who will plead your case?

Some translations say He's our *advocate*. The Greek word is *parakletos* [para-clay-toes] which means: advocate, comforter, defender.

- Q: Do you know the one time the devil tells the truth?
- A: When he accuses us ... sadly, he doesn't have to lie.

We're in court; the devil is the prosecuting attorney:

- Judge: [Sternly] And who will be representing you today?
- Sinner: Your Honor, through special circumstances ... You will.
- Judge: [Looking over papers – pleased] And how do you plead?
- Sinner: Guilty as sin.
- Judge: Not a problem, an atoning sacrifice has already been made.
- Devil: Objection, Your Honor. This is totally unfair!
- Judge: Yes it is, isn't it? [Sternly] Overruled! [Gavel]

When God forgives, He has our sin in view. When He justifies us and makes us righteous, He has His Son in view.

Q: How can we know if we have this advocate on our side?

[2<sup>nd</sup> bite] We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands. The man who says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But if anyone obeys his word, God's love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did. – 1 John 2:3-6 NIV

- Q: How can we know if He's our advocate?
- A: If we obey His commands.

John has to be thinking back 50 years to the last supper, just after Judas left the room to betray Jesus, Jesus said:

If you love me, you will obey what I command. – John 14:15 NIV

Q: What about those of us in the category of: *attempting to obey*?

Peter was at that dinner. And a few hours later he was in a courtyard saying, “I’m beg your pardon ... Jesus who?”

Q: What if we *honestly* struggle to walk as Jesus did?

As Spirit-filled believers we are able to not sin, but as fallen beings we are not able to be without sin. The battle *is* the obedience. But that’s only half of the equation. Have you ever used a pencil to mark your growth on a door frame? You examine and evaluate those marks for *any* indication of change.

- The battle *is* the obedience *if* progress is the proof

Obedience to the Lord is what separates the true believer from the false professor. But remember, it happens in increments. It’s a series of progressive failures.

Q: Do you examine and evaluate your life, in order to know that you’re becoming more and more aligned with His commands?

Now, to “walk as Jesus did” isn’t just about obedience.

**[3rd bite]** Dear friends, I am not writing you a new command but an old one, which you have had since the beginning. This old command is the message you have heard. Yet I am writing you a new command; its truth is seen in him and you, because the darkness is passing and the true light is already shining. – 1 John 2:7-8 NIV

The old command Jesus said, was also the greatest command: To love the Lord with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.

... and love your neighbor as yourself. – Luke 10:27 NIV

Q: So, how is this new?

A: Again, John is remembering the words of Jesus:

A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. ... - John 13:34 NIV

Q: It’s the same love-command ... but do you see the twist?

- The old version was to love your neighbor as yourself.
- The new version is to love one another as I've loved you.

This is the "truth that is seen in him". Jesus isn't bringing something new out of the OT. He's bringing something to light. The secret isn't in loving others as much as we love ourselves; it's in loving them more. It's about washing the feet of those who should be washing ours.

- To comprehend Christ we must love others sacrificially

As I comprehend Christ, I grow in my awareness and appreciation of how He loves me - unconditionally - perfectly and purely. Not because of who or what I am, but because of who and what He is.

And as I understand how I am loved, my love-capacity increases; and the barriers caused by having been loved imperfectly - my psychological love-limits - begin to break down. To love "as I'm loved!" is to have a reservoir and a resource of love to draw from and then to refocus onto others.

It is no longer a rule that regulates; it's a relationship that replenishes.

- I no longer love as I love myself.
- I love as I am loved by my *Parakletos* - my Sacrifice!

To "love as I am loved" isn't draining ... it's empowering! I can now defend those I once judged. This is how He works to complete His love in us.

**[4th bite]** Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness. Whoever loves his brother lives in the light, and there is nothing in him to make him stumble. But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness; he does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded him. - 1 John 2:9-11 NIV

There'll always be people we dislike; some with good reason, some for the silliest reasons ... we're all prone to "temper-tations"! But John is focusing on an attitude that causes us to ignore or despise others as irritants, competitors, and enemies.

- He's not talking about a feeling, but a choice.

If you want Christ to be your Parakletos (your defender) you cannot simply claim to walk in His light ... Judas did that.

We must wholeheartedly attempt to obey His commands *and* love others sacrificially, so that He can incrementally make His love complete in our hearts.