

O God, the Creator and Savior of the world, who made Yourself known in the work of man's redemption as the mystery of the ever adorable Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Three in One and One in Three, we humbly ask You, ... that being regenerate we may firmly believe the forgiveness of sins according to Your promise in baptism, and that we may daily increase in Christian love and in other good works, until we at last obtain eternal salvation. Amen. (*The Lutheran Liturgy, companion altar book for The Lutheran Hymnal, p. 134 & Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary, by Veit Dietrich, p. 157*)

See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know Him. Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when He appears we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who thus hopes in Him purifies himself as He is pure. Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. You know that He appeared to take away sins, and in Him there is no sin. No one who abides in Him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen Him or known Him. Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as He is righteous. Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in Him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God. By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.

In Christ Jesus, the only human being who practiced righteousness all of His days, dear fellow redeemed:

Did you sin yet today? Did you sin yesterday? How about the day before that? I will assume I know the answers. It is "yes" for all three questions. So how did these words from our text make you feel: "Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil ... By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God"? I trust you felt guilty and condemned.

But then maybe you think you know the Gospel of forgiveness in Christ so well you simply dismissed those words as not applicable to you. Maybe you even said something like Nicodemus said to Jesus in our Gospel lesson: *How can a sinner not practice sinning? How can this be?* But then as Jesus said to him, our Lord could say to you: *Are you one who calls yourself a Christian and yet you do not understand these*

things? Let us then examine our text for today and consider how **The Love of God Is the Practice of Righteousness, not of Sinning.**

I

God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit has made you His child through the waters of holy baptism. This is not your work, as though you turned yourself around and then were found acceptable to be called His child. No, listen to how it is so obvious that this alone is the gracious work of God Himself: “See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.” We are born again as Nicodemus heard Jesus describe it. We cannot do the work of entering our mother’s womb for the second time, but through water and the Spirit this miracle of rebirth is accomplished.

Our status as children of God is pure gift and what we will be in the end is beyond our comprehension. “Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when He appears we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him as He is.” Or as Paul puts it: “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.” We trust just as God is life, we too shall live; as He is righteous, we too shall be filled with righteousness; as He is immortal, we too shall never die.

But again this is all gift from God the Father through His Son to us. “You know that He, [God’s Son] appeared to take away sins, and in Him there is no sin.” The Son of God appeared in our world in human flesh. He lived a perfect life of righteousness under the Law so that He might make the holy sacrifice for all our unrighteousness.

The unbeliever hears this and assumes we now have a license to sin all we want. But the one who trusts in the Savior God has provided, knows just the opposite: “[E]veryone who thus hopes in Him purifies himself as He is pure.” Or as Luther sums up the second article: *“my Lord ... has redeemed me ... with His holy, precious blood, and with His innocent suffering and death; in order that I might be His own, live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness.”* Again, “The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.” – not to create a situation in which the works of the devil multiply and increase among the human race. How silly it would be for our Lord to sacrifice His all, so that we might be able to sin all the more!

II

So we are not called to be God’s children to keep on sinning, but to produce righteousness. So the Lord’s Apostle writes: “No one

who abides in Him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen Him or known Him. Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as He is righteous. Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning."

Yet, you and I, children of God who do know Him aright through His holy Son, our Savior, do still sin. Does that expression "*keeps on sinning*" apply to us? In one sense - *yes*, but in another - *no*. We struggle with our sin, our daily sin, our hourly sin just as the Apostle Paul admitted: "I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing." So yes, we do keep on sinning even though we are the redeemed children of God.

But here is the Apostle Paul also admitting that the expression as St. John uses does not apply to him, nor to any child of God. Writing to the Philippians Paul makes this observation: "Not that I ... am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me His own." How could he say this without living under the condemnation of his imperfection? Right before this he observed: I am "found in [Christ], not having a righteousness of my own that comes from law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith."

We are declared to be righteous before God for Jesus' sake alone, but how is it then that we practice righteousness and not sinning, my fellow sinners? Again this is the work of God, which naturally results in how our lives play out in daily repentance and faith. "No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in Him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God. By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil."

Today we honor earthly fathers. It is the seed of your father that abides in you. But it has no power to cause his will to be fulfilled in you. Yes, he perhaps passed on a good name to you, raised you, disciplined you to bring honor to his name. But he did not have power to enable you to do this, unlike your heavenly Father who through His Son and Spirit worked in you a fruitful regeneration.

Because we are still sinners, we may not so readily see our righteousness in daily living in our jumbled mess of our unrighteousness. But what thankfully is not so evident to us, is evident to our Lord who is continually sanctifying us. Remember how our Lord tells us it is all going to go down on the day of judgment? He will turn to us on His right whom He calls the

righteous and without mentioning our many sins, He will speak how we have fed, clothed, visited Him in this life. We will question this: asking when we did these things for Him and He will tell us whenever we have done these things to the least of His brothers, we have done it to Him.

The love of God at work in your life through His Son brought to you in your daily vocations by the Spirit is the sanctified life of practicing righteousness as His dearly loved child. You are blessed so that the practicing of sinning has ceased in your life, since you by God's grace repent of your sin and trust in His Son for not only forgiveness of all your sin, but also for your everlasting righteousness. God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is to be praised for what He has accomplished and is still accomplishing in you. Amen.