

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Fourteenth Sunday after Trinity, September 21, 2014

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 369, 381:1, 380, 396, 26:3.

Lessons: Job 11:13-20, Romans 6:1-14, John 8:31-45.

Sermon Text: 1 John 3:3-10.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

What is your hope as a Christian? Didn't John summarize it in the previous chapter when he wrote "*And now, dear children, continue in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming.*" (1 John 2:28)

Now he continues with this fact which should be obvious for a Christian: "*every one that has this hope resting upon him will purify himself, just as He [Jesus] is pure.*" Every one who puts his confidence in God, as the Author and Finisher of his salvation, will want to do everything he can to separate and cleanse himself from everything that is an abomination in the sight of God. We always have the example of Christ before our eyes as one who was perfectly pure and holy. Today we consider

THE HOPE AND GOAL OF THE BELIEVER

1. **The hope of the Christian.**
2. **Jesus, the sinless one, takes away our sins.**
3. **The believer strives to do what is right in God's eyes.**

Remember the hope that John is talking about. Not only do Christians want to "*be confident and unashamed before him at his coming*" but standing righteous before Christ on judgment day is part of that hope. Last week John spoke of it in this way: "*But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.*"

Because we have that hope of eternal life, we purify ourselves. How do we make ourselves pure? Well, it isn't really a matter of making ourselves pure. We are purified because God purifies us. Our sins are washed away and we are washed clean in the blood of Jesus, his Son. John told us in chapter 1: "*the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.*" (1 John 1:7)

Sin. We know what sin is. We know the Ten Commandments. But John speaks of sin again here, lest we think that we are the ones responsible for purifying ourselves: "*Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness.*"

Sin is breaking the law. It is lawlessness. It is setting aside God's law. It is ignoring God's law. It is having no law. It is trying to be a law unto ourselves, and making our own rules for our own lives.

"*Everyone who sins breaks the law*" – and that is literally everyone! But – and here is a beautiful reminder again – Jesus appeared to take away our sins.

Yes, John speaks repeatedly of sin. But he also speaks repeatedly of the forgiveness of our sins through Jesus Christ. The one who took away our sins is sinless. "*But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin.*"

Then John again makes application to our lives: "*No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him.*"

No one who lives for the sake of sin has either seen God or known him. So you can see that if we live in him we do not keep on willfully and intentionally sinning. John emphasizes that idea and repeats it: if anyone

continues to sin – willfully, intentionally – he hasn't seen or known Jesus. He hasn't looked on him in faith, hasn't recognized him and hasn't heard his words. He has not known Jesus, and thus does not know the true God.

Then John addresses us again as ***“dear children”*** – a tender admonition. ***“Do not let anyone lead you astray”***. John in this letter is warning about those who want to lead us astray from the true God and the truths of the true God and again emphasizes the importance of staying in, of remaining in Christ.

Then John goes back to the point he was making: ***“He who does what is right is righteous, just as he [God the Father and his son Jesus] is righteous.”*** There's that word we talked about last week – righteous – meaning sinless and morally perfect.

John then contrasts God with the archenemy: the devil. ***“He who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work.”***

Look at the contrast: the Son of God versus the devil. Remember, Satan has been sinning longer than mankind has been on earth. Satan has been sinning and he keeps on doing it. He wants nothing more than to drag everyone down to eternal damnation in hell with him.

Then John comes right back with Gospel: The reason Jesus came was to destroy the devil and all his power. We rejoice in Paul's words in First Corinthians 15: ***“O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”*** (1 Corinthians 15:55-57 KJV) Paul is quoting Isaiah: ***“He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from off all faces”*** (Isaiah 25:8 KJV)

John gives another reason why one who is born of God will not continue to sin and does not live for the sake of sin: ***“because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God.”***

The one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as Christ is righteous. The one who practices and lives in sin is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. This clear statement is intended to remove all misunderstandings and prevent every form of deception. Christian character as it is molded by faith is bound to express itself in righteous conduct. Christ the Lord is the type, the example, the pattern of righteousness, of a life of perfect holiness. A spiritual child of God will have Christ's character; a disciple of Christ will follow the Master. On the other hand, a person who deliberately commits sin, who is a servant of sin, in that way shows himself an apt pupil, a very child of the devil; a workshop of Satan, for the devil works in the children of disobedience and uses them as his tools for committing every form of sin. The very first sin of mankind which is recorded was caused by Satan, since he had even before that rebelled against God; and he has, from that time, induced men to sin and made them his slaves, the servants of unrighteousness and damnation.

The Son of God was manifested so that he might destroy the works of the devil. He assumed true humanity, in order that as our Substitute he might totally destroy every work by which the devil exerted his power, loosen the bonds of sin in which men were held captive, and take away the power and influence of the devil by which he tried to drag us down forever into his kingdom.

If one is born of God – we are God's children, remember? – that one will not continue sinning, will not make sinning his normal, customary way of life. Why? God's seed remains in him. God has planted in each believer, through baptism or through hearing the Word of God as an adult, whichever came first, the seed of eternal life, the seed which has helped him or her grow into a son – or daughter – of God, a living, growing child of God.

The Christian doesn't want to live in a life of sin. He just can't! It is not impossible for him to sin, it happens. But it isn't his primary nature.

Deliberate, malicious, intentional sinning is incompatible with the new life of the Christian. The apostle makes a distinction between sins of malice and those of weakness, those which come upon a person unawares.

You heard in our Epistle lesson the same idea: ***“Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your***

body to him as instruments of righteousness. For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace." (Romans 6:12-14)

However, we must take time today to make one false teaching clear: These words of the apostle do not state, as the so-called perfectionists claim, that a Christian here on earth will reach a stage in which he, in his own person, is sinless. Because we still have our sinful nature to contend with, we Christians are prone to stumble and even to fall. It is according to the new man that we are pure in the sight of God, for the sake of Christ's righteousness. It is according to our regenerated new man that we do not commit sin and that we keep all our members in subjection unto holiness. But our carnal self, the old Adam, repeatedly transgresses the will of God. For this reason we must constantly fight against our sinful flesh.

Our text draws to a close with these words: ***"This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother."***

The birth from God takes place through the Gospel and through the power of the Holy Ghost in the Gospel. When this regeneration, this new birth, has been achieved, one is a child of God according to his new, divine nature, his new man. It is natural for the children, the offspring of God to remain in him, and thus to do only that which is pleasing to him.

In addition, the seed of the Word of God, which caused the Christian to be born again in the first place, has its home in his heart and makes his heart fruitful in all good works. The new birth in God is the reason why such a person cannot continue in sin; for by becoming a servant of sin, he would be guilty of deeds which would deny and destroy the new birth.

Thus the attitude of every person with regard to sin and righteousness reveals who he really is. The children of God constantly seek to live like Christ, and the children of the devil are those who do not practice righteousness and do not show true, Godly love. Every one that does not make righteousness his goal, does not strive after perfection with all the power at his command, does not make the will of God the sphere of his activity, thereby offers unmistakable evidence of not being born of God, of still being a child of the devil — a terrible condition that condemns to hell!

John also tells us that ***"anyone who does not love his brother"*** is not a child of God. John comes back to love, brotherly, Christian love again and again. Brotherly love is the very essence and substance of the Christian life. The tree is known by its fruit, and the faith of the Christian must be revealed in love.

That, according to the Word of God, according to the last instructions of Jesus, is the outstanding trait and characteristic of the believer: he must show his appreciation of the wonderful blessings of Christ of which he has become a partaker in his love toward his fellow-Christians and toward all men. As we continue our series on First John, we will also talk next week about love.

Lord, guide us to live to you, and live in love, day in and day out, every day, with our deeds and especially with our hearts! Amen.