

Written Copy: 1 John 3:2-8 “The Supernatural Love that Changes You”

3rd Sunday of Easter

Sunday, April 17th, 2021

Text: 1 John 3:2-8

² 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. ³ And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure. ⁴ Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. ⁵ You know that he appeared to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. ⁶ No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. ⁷ Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. ⁸ 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.

The text's intent

John explains how there is no middle ground as we stand before the Father. There are His children who have been changed by the love He grants us through the gift of faith so that we center our lives on repentantly obeying His commands as our love response to Him. Or we are children of the Devil who live lives centered in opposition to God's will as revealed in His commandments. These do not have faith, have no salvation, and do not have true love for God or for their fellow man. But Christ came to destroy these sinful works by moving them to see the truth of their lives, repent, and turn in faith toward Him so that they can become children of the Heavenly Father.

Focus Statement:

Jesus came to take away our love of sinning, and by bringing repentant faith to bear on our hearts. He crushes our hearts by revealing how far short we fall from what God expects and then lovingly heals our heart through the Gospel. He gives us credit for His righteous life declaring that we are children of the Heavenly Father. His grace and love move us from being children of the Devil to precious children who seek to be obedient like Christ is.

Function Statement:

Why it's important to know:

In my struggle with sin I can sometimes see myself as making a practice of sinning, especially as I struggle with the same sins over and over. Others practice lawlessness by defining what is and what is not sin on their own terms, according to that the world and their own sinful heart declares as allowable.

What the hearer should do as a result:

See that when we define what sin is apart from God's word, we live in lawless disobedience outside of faith and salvation. But Christ came to call us back, moves us to repent of our love of sinning, and live lives centered on loving obedience to Him.

Subject Sentence: Jesus' supernatural love creates loving obedience.

Introduction: Do You and I Make a Practice of Sinning?

I begin this sermon with a heads-up warning for you: you may find yourself uncomfortable with portions of this message. But perhaps this should be expected given what we just read from our Epistle Lesson from 1 John. When I read that lesson just a few minutes ago, did you find yourself being a little bit uncomfortable with any of the verses? How about **1 John 3:4 “Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness.”** How about **1 John 3:6 No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him.** And **1 John 3:8a Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning.** Now, as I look at my life, it could be described at times as me making a practice of sinning. Every day when I reflect on God’s Word, I see the ways I’ve fallen short of what He expects of me. Every time we have confession on Sunday morning there are always things I need to repent of. And truth be told some of these things I wouldn’t care to confess publicly in front of you. And even worse, when I think about John’s use of the phrase “makes a practice of sinning”, and I look at those sins that I struggle with, the ones I must continually repent of, that begins to look a lot like me making of practice of sinning. And I suspect that if each of you are honest with yourselves, this all strikes home to you too.

But this struggle that we all have with sin was brought to bear upon my heart and soul during a discussion I had with our Confirmands recently. They brought up two issue that they’ve had to deal with as they live out their lives in the world; issues that I never really had to deal with when I was their age. They have fellow classmates at school who have shared that they have an inborn desire for same sex relationships, and some that desire to identify as a different gender than that which they were born with. Specifically, they are talking about homosexuality and transgenderism. The Confirmands question was that since we regard both of these things as sins, how is that our struggles as Christians with sin is any different from theirs?

This is becoming an issue not only for kids in school, it’s an issue that is being put before our Congress right now. The Senate is dealing with HR-5, a bill that was passed by the U.S. House of Representatives already. HR-5 states ***“This bill prohibits discrimination based on sex, sexual orientation, and gender identity in areas including public accommodations and facilities, education, federal funding, employment, housing, credit, and the jury system. Specifically, the bill defines and includes sex, sexual orientation, and gender identity among the prohibited categories of discrimination or segregation. The bill expands the definition of public accommodations to include places or establishments that provide (1) exhibitions, recreation, exercise, amusement, gatherings, or displays; (2) goods, services, or programs; and (3) transportation services. The bill allows the Department of Justice to intervene in equal protection actions in federal court on account of sexual orientation or gender identity. The bill prohibits an individual from being denied access to a shared facility, including a***

restroom, a locker room, and a dressing room, that is in accordance with the individual's gender identity.

The troubling thing for me is that a man can, according to his own whim, identify himself as a woman and gain access to the woman locker room or restroom in establishments described as public accommodations, which would include schools, gyms, restaurants. Could this affect us as a house of worship? In the past houses of worship have been exempt from these kinds of equality acts. But there is a push among those who are behind this bill to include houses of worship as public accommodations, force them to comply in the name of political correctness, and thereby make us conform to what the court of public opinion thinks is right.

What We Believe and Confess as an LCMS Congregation

The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod believes and confesses that according to Scripture homosexuality and transgenderism is sinful. But it is no more sinful than what I repent of daily. We would cite the Creation account where mankind was created male and female according to the will, plan, and design of God, and not according to the will and desire of the individual. Each gender was created to fulfill a special purpose in God's plan which is most clearly seen when the two become one as stated in **Genesis 2:24 Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.** When man and women come together in marriage, then they can fulfill the LORD's plan and design for Creation, **Genesis 1:28 And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."** Being fruitful and multiplying can only happen when a man and a woman come together. God created some male and some female for this purpose. And when someone decides to change the gender that they were born with, they are saying the LORD of made a mistake. That would mean the LORD is in the wrong, not perfect, not sinless. And saying that about our God would be defined as sin.

Some argue that they were born with an attraction to the same sex, or they were born with an innate desire to be the opposite gender from what they were born as. They argue, "If I'm born this way how can it be wrong? How can I expect to ignore it?" And I would admit, it is very possible that some are predisposed to same sex attraction. While there may also be cultural factors at work that help to facilitate these feelings, because they were born this way individuals see these things not as sinful or wrong but part of who they are. But is sin only those things that one makes a conscious choice to do? No! Sin is definitely those conscious planned acts that we commit, but it includes the anger that rises up as a gut reaction to something. It includes the unwelcomed sinful thoughts that flood my brain. The answer is not to make sin only something we can control. That is the reason for **1 John 1:8-9⁸ If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from**

all unrighteousness. Because I can't control the sin that is in my life I can't live without Jesus.

And there are those who call themselves Christian who would argue that Jesus came to remove the stigma over these things that were socially unacceptable in the past. They argue that since all sin is forgiven by Jesus' death and resurrection how can the Church judge those who adopt a homosexual lifestyle or identify as the opposite gender they are born as being evil? Jesus is all about love and forgiveness. And after all, don't all Christians struggle with sin in their lives, sometimes the same sin over and over? If we believe we can be forgiven of that sin, how can we deny forgiveness to those who live in same sex relationships and are transgender?

Argument from Scripture

So what is the answer? First of all are you forgiven for the repetitive sins that most of us deal with such as lying, gossiping, lust for worldly things, and impure thoughts? YES! You are forgiven. Christ went to the cross and died to take away any and all sins from you, from me, from the whole world. **John 3:16-17** ¹⁶ "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Christ came to forgive all sins, that includes my struggles with temptations as well as those who are in same sex relationships and are struggling with transgenderism. So, if that's the case, how can the LCMS take the position that same sex marriage and transgenderism is wrong? What about **John 3:18** **Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.** Christ came and suffered the sins of the whole world so that no one should perish. But people still do perish, those who die in unbelief. The key to having His salvation work applied to your life is faith.

The answer is found in correctly understanding **1 John 3:4** **Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness.** What does John mean by "lawlessness"? He is talking about a life lived out with a total disregard for God's will and plan as stated and described in His commands. Those who live a "lawless" life have concluded that God's law is wrong, it doesn't apply to me. Maybe it worked once upon a time but here in the 21st century it no longer works. Jesus' love for all people triumphs over the condemnation of the law. If we were to hold that position, we would have to ignore what Jesus Himself taught in **Matthew 5:17-19** ¹⁷ "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. ¹⁸ For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. ¹⁹ Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called

great in the kingdom of heaven. The law has not been done away with; it still stands. It no longer condemns us since Jesus fulfilled it on our behalf. But His fulfilling it does not let us off the hook for living by it as a guide for living the Christian life.

Jesus told His disciples then as well as us today in **John 14:15 "If you love me, you will keep my commandments.** And what did Jesus command them and us? **John 15:12 "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.** And how does God tell us we should show love for Him and for one another? By keeping His commandments. By fulfilling His law and design for life lived out on this earth, not by defining what is right and wrong according to our own heart and feelings, or by what culture defines as right and wrong. Apart from God each and every human being has a self-centered sinful heart that desires what stands in opposition to God's will and plan. When I or anyone else define right and wrong according to my own heart it is guaranteed to be sin, to be lawlessness. And as **1 John 3:4** tells us **Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness**

But then what about **1 John 3:8-9** which clearly states: **⁸Whoever 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. ⁹No 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.** What about my practice of sinning and your practice of sinning? What about our continued need for repentance over the same old sins? Doesn't that mean we are children of the devil and not children of God? On the cross Christ destroyed the devil's ability to claim me as his own. And in my baptism, I was born again of God with His seed, the Holy Spirit planted in me, and constantly at work in me.

The difference in our lives is what Christ changing us from being children of the devil and into beloved children of the Father. **1 John 3:1 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.** We have been changed forever by that supernatural love of Christ. We have been born again as children of the Heavenly Father. The love that drove Jesus to suffer and die has been given to us and changes our life. **Romans 6:1-5 ¹What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? ²By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? ³Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. ⁵For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.** In Christ we no longer live lives that are characterized by sinful disobedience. In baptism I'm given a new life with a new desire to obey my Lord and Savior. I still do sin, but in the ongoing work of my baptism I recognize my lawlessness as sin that needs to be repented of, instead of a lawlessness that is excused by Jesus' death and resurrection.

I see and confess my struggles with sin as just that: struggles with sin, struggles with disobedience. But my heart has been changed by Jesus Supernatural love that comes through the gift of faith. I don't desire to live in lawlessness. My heart desires is to obey the laws and commands of my Lord and Savior. And when the Holy Spirit given in my baptism shows me how I have violated this, my heart breaks. That's repentance. And instead of giving up or giving myself over to living in sin, the repentant faith I've been given in baptism moves me to hold fast to Jesus' love and forgiveness. It moves me to ask Him to help me change, help me to live according to His will and desire, not my own sinful will and desire. That's not living to practice sin. That's living in repentant faith.

But what about those who live in a same sex situation or seek to change their birth gender? They are not living in a repentant faith relationship with Christ. They are either living in lawlessness where they don't care what God says in His Word about how mankind is to live, or they are making Jesus their excuse to sin instead of their Savior from sin. These are beyond the sins that we all struggle with. Same sex relationships and transgenderism are lifestyle sins, and those engaged in them are unrepentant. It would be the same as someone who was cheating on their spouse, who came and confessed that sin as part of our Corporate Confession on Sunday morning all the while making plans to meet up with their cheating partner after worship. Engaging in lifestyle sin is living in unrepentance. It's living a life where one makes a practice of sinning. And as **1 John 3:8** says **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.**

Does that mean there is no hope for those engaged in lifestyle sins? NO! The hope they have is the same hope you and I have right there in verse 8! Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil, including the devil's voice in culture that truth is relative and that each individual can choose for himself what is right and wrong. Jesus is God the Son who came to earth to show us what a life lived out in right standing before the Father is. It is the life He lived as He walked the earth. And by faith He gives to you and to me the credit for His perfect life. By faith He declares us what we could never be on our own: righteous before God-in right standing with Him.

Not only that but **1 John 3:5** **You know that he appeared to take away sins, and in him there is no sin.** Jesus who had no sin took the sins of the whole world upon Himself and took them away from each and every one of us. That's the source of the gift of repentant faith we are given in the Gospel Message, the gift that was showered upon us in our Baptism and is given to us in the Lord's Supper. The Holy Spirit lovingly shows us our sin so that He can point to our Savior. And through the gift of faith worked in our heart we hold fast to all that Jesus has done to forgive all of our sins, save us from eternal condemnation, give us life with Him now and eternal life to come.

Conclusion

Sin has infected all of our lives, both those who are believers in Jesus as well as those who do not believe. Sin has messed up our physical bodies, emotions, and the desires of our hearts. Sin has affected our genetic makeup including the predisposition to substance abuse, mental issues, dysfunctions like kleptomania, as well as issues like same sex attraction and transgenderism. No matter where sin reveals itself in our lives, we cannot get rid of it on our own. We all need a Savior. Jesus has come to be that Savior, to remove the condemning power in our life. He has come to change our lives by the power of His grace and supernatural love. His desire for each and every person is not to bring us to faith and leave us where we are, but through the work of the Holy Spirit to change us. He works to purify us through our repentance. He works on us a little at a time. Sometimes that work hurts as He points out something in our lives that is sinful. But that is all done in love so that we might not lose our faith, but remain His precious children made so in our Baptism. And where do those who are struggling with any kind of sin, including lifestyle sins belong? Right here! Here where they can hear God's Word. Here where they can be moved to repentance by the work of the Holy Spirit. Here where they can be loved by us as a precious child of God for whom Christ died, just as he did for you and for me. The supernatural love of Jesus changes everything. It's at work changing me. I pray it is at work changing you as well. Amen.