

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
www.lutheranlccf.org
Last Sunday after Trinity, November 23, 2014

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

Hymns: 611:1-5, 235:6, 281, 77:12-15, 377:7.

Lessons: Ps. 110, Ga. 4:1-9, John 10:7-18.

Sermon Text: 1 John 5:18-21.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Many people have questions about who they really are, especially if they have been adopted. Many adopted children search for a long time seeking to find their birth parents. If we follow that analogy, we realize that Christians don't need to search very far to find out who we are now. Paul writes that we, by nature, were *"gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath."* (Ephesians 2:3) By nature, by our natural birth, we were enemies of God, and deserved only to receive his anger. However, that passage goes on: *"But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions--it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus."* (Ephesians 2:4-7)

So we know who we are. We are God's adopted sons. Paul also makes that clear in Galatians 4: *"But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons."* (Galatians 4:4-5)

BELIEVERS KNOW WHO THEY ARE

1. **Believers are not perfect, not sinless.**
2. **We are God's children but the world is under control of Satan.**
3. **Jesus has given us understanding and we are in him.**
4. **And finally we are admonished: *"Dear children, keep yourselves from idols."***

As John concludes this letter, he writes to believers about the certainties of their faith. He reminds us that Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God keeps them safe, that they are the children of God, and that they are safely in him.

John had written a few verses earlier: *"I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life."* (1 John 5:13) John's goal in this letter is to assure his readers who have centered their faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, as their Savior, that in this way they possessed eternal life. Faith has nothing in common with doubt and uncertainty. Faith is not simply a matter of personal opinion and feeling. It is a sure knowledge based upon the Word of the Gospel. We know that we have eternal life through faith because the Scripture tells us so. *"For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus."* (Galatians 3:26)

Satan wants to keep people in doubt and uncertainty. He has even connived with churches that are considered "Christian" to keep people uncertain of their eternal salvation through Jesus Christ. A human by nature lives for the sake of sin. But the one who is born again *"through the living and enduring word of God"* (1 Peter 1:23) has faith in God and is in Jesus Christ.

John repeats a point he made earlier. *"We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin."* This verse at first seems like perfectionism, the false teaching that people can progress to the point where they don't sin any more. It does not mean that the believer, born of water and the Spirit, lives a sinless life or can

become sinless in this life. John wrote in chapter one: ***"If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us."*** He wrote in chapter three that reborn Christians do not continue in sin, that is, make it a lifestyle, enjoy it, refuse correction, and above all, refuse to repent of it. People who are spiritually alive regret their sins, find forgiveness in Christ, and change their attitudes and activities. This is what happens when the power of the Spirit lives in the mind and heart of a reborn human being. Christ is the example, the pattern of righteousness, of a life of perfect holiness. A disciple of Christ will follow the Master.

On the other hand, a person who deliberately sins, who is a servant of sin, in that way shows himself the 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. Since the very first sin of mankind, Satan has induced men to sin and made them his slaves, the servants of unrighteousness and damnation.

The Son of God was sent into the world 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 – and we are God's children, remember? – that one will not continue sinning, that is, will not make sinning his normal, customary way of life. Why? He is born again of God and God is in him. God has planted in each believer, through the Word of God and baptism the seed of eternal life, the seed which has helped him or her grow into a son or a daughter of God, a living child of God.

The Christian doesn't want to live in a life of sin. 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.

After this comment, John points to Jesus Christ, ***"the one who was born of God"***. This is plainly a reference to Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, who ***"keeps [the believer] safe, and the evil one cannot harm him."*** Here is a spectacular promise, one that will help us rest in peace each evening. He keeps believers safe. Not only has the Father solemnly obligated himself toward his children, but the Good Shepherd too has solemnly obligated himself toward his sheep. We can and do rejoice in the security of the arms of Christ as he spoke to us in John 10 as our Good Shepherd: ***"I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand"*** (verse 28).

Only through Jesus can anyone be born of God and live as God's beloved child.

We do not, according to the new man, serve sin. Instead, all true children of God keep a watchful eye on God and they observe his holy will very carefully. This attitude is the best form of defense against the attacks of the devil, who finds it impossible to make a successful attack under such circumstances. Even if he does cause a Christian to fall, the Christian will arise with repentance and the assurance of forgiveness and hurry back to true fellowship with God. Christ guards us because we are his children.

"We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one." The whole world lies in the power of the evil one, Satan, the devil. They have no choice but to sin. A human by nature lives for the sake of sin.

These words serve as assurance and comfort again for the believer. John wrote in chapter two: ***"Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world--the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does--comes not from the Father but from the world."*** (1 John 2:15-16)

The entire world is lying in evil. We Christians are of God, born of God, regenerated through his power in the Gospel. We are God's dear children and intend to remain his children, though the entire world is living in wickedness and sin and is held there, full of enmity toward God. For an imaginative picture of this, think of a whirlpool such as you see at a waterfall or at the rapids below the waterfall or a dam. Whatever is caught in that is gone, is lost, and is held in destruction.

God's child does not seek to live in Satan's power, but the world is helplessly in Satan's grasp. Its only hope is in Jesus Christ, through the working of the Holy Spirit through the means of grace. Believers are secure under the protecting power of God just like a child in its mother's arms. God keeps the believer in his embrace.

John assures us ***“We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true.”*** The world offers a great deal of its wisdom. But God assures us in his Word that ***“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.”*** (Proverbs 9:10)

This final assurance and guarantee is ours: Jesus came so that we may get to know him, the True One; and we are in the True One, Jesus Christ. Jesus gives us another, final picture for our hope and confidence: ***“And we are in him who is true--even in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.”***

Believers know that they are in Christ. Think of the contrast between being in and being outside. People can be happier and more content when they are in something, in a team, in a group, in an organization rather than excluded from it. Think of the comfort that we see in children who are being cocooned in something – blanket, a bed, a special hiding or play place, the arms of the parent. Adults have the same feeling of safety in some places. And this is one of those places in which anyone can feel safe. The one who believes Jesus Christ came to redeem him or her from sin is safe in Jesus. The song-writer reminds us that “He’s got the whole world in his hand.” And because we are in Jesus, we are living and loving one another for the sake of Jesus, awaiting with joy the day of his coming again with glory, of our seeing him just as he is. Believers can know and be confident that theirs is the knowledge of the one true God. They know in whom they have believed for eternal life! They want to and strive to keep in God, and in his Word.

John concludes his letter with the appeal ***“Dear children, keep yourselves from idols.”*** Guard yourselves from idols. If and because we are in Jesus Christ, we cannot want, we will not want anything to do with false gods, or with any kind of idols. Because we know the true, we reject the false.

We must be on guard against any such God-substitute, whether it is a thing, a person, an idea, or even a place. Idolatry is so subtle and at the same time so glaring and obvious today that we may not always recognize it. It seems that it is only in some parts of the world that we see people bowing down to some kind of statues to worship them. But people also make gods of things, possessions, wealth, property. We think that we need so much. Unless, of course, we learn about some people from a “third world country” or a “developing country”. Unless, that is, we see television news stories of people who have lost everything, as in a typhoon or hurricane or tornado.

But Satan has also adopted terminology that Christians use, and has changed people’s ideas of what and who the true God is so that your neighbor who goes to a so-called “Christian church” may have a totally different picture of Jesus or God than you do. Just because someone uses the same words you do does not mean that they are intending to mean the same thing you do when, for example, you confess your faith in the words of the Apostolic Creed. Many have been taught and believe that Jesus is merely a great prophet, or perhaps even the illegitimate son of some Roman soldier. But he is “true God, begotten of the father from eternity, and also true man.” This very fact, this very truth, is one of the ideas that false teachers whom John wrote about in this letter rejected and denied.

This warning against idolatry is especially important today. Who is the Jesus of other churches? If we look at the book ***“What’s Going On Among The Lutherans?”*** (Northwestern Publishing House, 1992) we see that not every church that even claims the name Lutheran teaches and believes without qualification that Jesus Christ is both true God and true man, the sinless Savior of mankind. When we see teachings that take things away from the Bible, or add things to the Bible, or twist the Bible’s teachings in any way, we realize that idolatry is very much alive today!

Little children, guard yourselves from idols! John’s readers knew Jesus Christ as the true God, as the one Savior in whom they were sure of eternal life.

Cling to Christ and do not accept or follow the antichristian substitutes which false teachers try to introduce. This is not a matter to be taken lightly, since it involves our soul's salvation. So we must, in these last hours of the world, be vigilant and sober to reject everything antichristian and strive mightily to keep ourselves unspotted for the glorious revelation of Jesus Christ, our Savior. Lord keep us in you! Amen.