

**Having Sin vs. Committing Sin**  
**(1<sup>st</sup> John 3:1-7)**  
**Pastor Espinosa**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our risen Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. Alleluia! Christ is risen! And this dear Christians has put us into a whole new relationship with God and in a whole new relationship with sin. To be in the risen Christ – as your baptism assures you that you absolutely are – means among other things that sin is no longer your master (Romans 6). You have died to sin. Christ died with your sin upon Him...your sin was buried with Him. It is covered and as far as God is concerned, it is gone (which explains why God doesn't remember it, Is 43:25: "It is I who sweep away your transgressions for My own sake and remember your sins no more."). And since you are joined to Christ who St. John says in our epistle is righteous, practicing sin is out, practicing righteousness is in.

Didymus the Blind explains: "Just as the person who dwells in virtue and true doctrine does not sin and is not ignorant, so the one who remains in Christ, who is his righteousness and sanctification, does not sin. For how can someone act unrighteously when he is in the company of righteousness, and how can he be content to place corruption alongside holiness?" (Ancient Christian Commentary, New Testament XI, 197)

Does this make you uneasy? I hope so. It's supposed to. Not as a ploy or a manipulation, but as maintaining what the Holy Spirit is always doing for our own good: generating the terrors of conscience in us so that we would hunger and thirst for God's grace in Christ over and over again! We cannot rationalize our situation. We are in Christ. Christ is risen! Sin has been defeated. What it produces, namely death, has been defeated. These cannot mark those who are in Christ. Thus, St. John is plain at 1<sup>st</sup> 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." That's pretty clear.

John is not denying that the sinful nature clings to us. He does not reject the truth of our original sin; nor does he suggest we are not to confess our sin. How could he when he is the one who also wrote, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves..." and obviously then leads us to confess our sin. (1<sup>st</sup> John 1:8-9). So again, John is neither denying nor contradicting any of these things.

At the same time, John is defending, teaching, and proclaiming your new identity. He started by saying that God calls you children of God, and then says point blank: "and so we are." God calls and things come into existence. His Word creates. He spoke over the universe: "let there be light" and there was light; He speaks over you: you are a child of God and behold, that is what you are! In and through Jesus, God has called you His child. Hear it again, that is what you are.

So St. John is saying that since this is what you are, this is what this life looks like...it doesn't sin. He is grabbing our attention and slapping us from falling asleep in Satan's deception and lies. Dr. Schuchard gives an uncompromising commentary and tells the truth: "John has indicated [instead] that sin is no small matter. Sin is deadly. So the apostle gives no permission in weakness or otherwise to sin, ever. Sin is ever present, corrupting every thought, word, and deed (see 1:8, 10). John extols not to some kind of born-again perfectionism. Neither does he here or elsewhere (see further 3:9) contradict himself. Rather, he exhorts in consistent terms to a concerted pattern, to a tenor, to a way of life that is ever lived in active opposition to sins' pervasive influence and power, that sin would never be either an indifferent matter or a 'settled habit.' In no way does the sinner acquiesce, give up,

give in, tolerate, condone, or otherwise ignore sin. In no way does the sinner suggest that the reign of sin is 'just the way God made me.'" (Bruce G. Schuchard, *Concordia Commentary, 1-3 John*, 328-329)

This reminds me of being taught by one of my sainted professors in seminary, Professor Kurt Marquart. I remember his admonition to us about receiving the confession of sin. There is to be a balanced response: we show Christ's compassion and never condemn – how could we since we receive confession in order to absolve? – but at the same time we receive the hearing of sin as very serious. We never come off as: "Hey, cheer up, you're only human!" Such a response would be a mockery to God and a disservice to God's people!

Furthermore, we also see all of this come out in our tradition of worship. Please turn to page 19 of today's bulletin where we pray Luther's Morning Prayer. Note the words: "and I pray that You would **keep me this day also from sin...**". Furthermore, consider the great words of the Gospel canticle "Te Deum" (We Praise You, O God): [stanza 9]: "Grant, O Lord, to **keep us this day without sin**. O Lord, have mercy upon us, have mercy upon us. O Lord, let Your mercy be upon us, as our trust is in You. O Lord, in You have I trusted; let me never be confounded."

But this is the problem we face in our world and in our hearts. We try desperately to convince ourselves that to sin is nothing. We console ourselves about lying by calling lies "little white lies," we try to rationalize by saying that no one got hurt or that no one is getting hurt and when we say or think this, we have no idea what we are talking about. We have no idea how dangerous sin is. Sin destroys. It is the weapon of Satan. When Traci and I visited Germany, we purchased a picture of one of the altar pieces by Cranach. His work of the Ten Commandments depicts each of the Ten Commandments being violated. In every single picture he places a demon that is propelling the sin. Sin destroys, it introduces the presence of the demonic. A violation of the 5<sup>th</sup> commandment hurts and destroys life. A violation of the 6<sup>th</sup> commandment hurts and destroys marriage. There is no way around it, sin injects the work of the devil...sin always hurts and destroys...and this damage falls on ourselves and others. We can't go along with the stupidity of the world that A) wants to ignore it; B) wants to suppress it; C) wants to excuse it...none of these are answers for the Christian...none of these are answers for you...because God has said you are His child. That is what you are.

Luther was profound on his commentary of this and pulls no punches: "We are all sinners, and now and then we fall into sin; but if a true Christian falls, he soon comes back, turns about, and fights against sin, lest it burst forth into a stumbling block for his neighbor. Although it is difficult to avoid being wounded in war, yet it is an honor to stand up. But it is a disgrace to yield. Thus even if a Christian is surrounded by sin, yet he fights against sin. There are Christians who think that they are Christians because they have been baptized. They relax the reins. They are not concerned about conquering sins, but they follow their lusts. To commit sin is to follow the impulse and the desire to sin. Many give free rein. They do not want to repent or to rise again. Today they commit adultery; tomorrow they want to purify themselves. It is impossible for them not to offend their neighbors, if not in a positive way, certainly in a negative way, by not giving their neighbor his due. For the other part of Christianity is love. But love does not insist on its own way (1 Cor. 13:5). Insisting on one's own way is not loving one's neighbor but following one's own desires. Therefore not to have love is to be guilty of lawlessness. He who does not purify himself, who does not battle against himself every day, yields to sin and is guilty of lawlessness. He who does not show fruit in his flesh does not show fruit toward his neighbor either. If I am not dead to myself, so that I do not give up the concern for pleasure, how can I seek the things of others? Therefore he who is guilty of lawlessness does not have love." (Ibid, 329, quoting from AE 30:269)

Luther reminds us that we can't cut corners when it comes to our epistle. St. John writes that "sin is lawlessness." This is a biblical definition of sin and does not permit man's definitions to compromise what sin is. Some English translations of this passage of 1<sup>st</sup> John 3:4 read that "sin is the transgression of the law," but this idea wants to make sin only sin when we commit certain acts...but when people let sin rein, then they are in a state of lawlessness. They are in full mode against God, resisting God, fighting against Him...they are behaving like the devil and are making an internal statement: "I don't want God to be my Father, but I want the devil to be my father." That's how serious this is.

But St. John won't tolerate this kind of deception. Again he proclaims the truth: you are children of God. This is what you are! (1<sup>st</sup> John 3:1). And because Christ is your life and since you are in Christ, you are in the pure one. He is pure as St. John simply puts forth. (1<sup>st</sup> John 3:3). But if you're in Christ, then His purity has rubbed off on you. His purity is your purity. You are His. You are pure. The split second I say this, your sinful nature and Satan want to deny what I've said. The devil whispers in your ear, "Pastor Espinosa is the liar! You aren't pure. You aren't God's child. This is why you must serve sin!" No! Christian. THAT is the lie, and see that I am simply proclaiming what is the Word of God! The truth is that you a child of God. You are in Christ. Christ is pure. You are pure. With this new identity, making a practice of sinning is counter to who you are. After all, Jesus your Savior came to take away sin...to wash it away by His blood. This is what He did for you...by His blood, you are cleansed, you are washed. God can't even see it anymore! Micah 7:19: "He will again have compassion on us; he will tread our iniquities underfoot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea." So given your new status, why go deep-sea fishing for a great white that will come up and bite your head off? Leave it there: buried in the depths of the sea!

Remember what the Lord is doing Christian:

1. He makes sin deadly serious to wake us so that we strive to avoid it at all costs.
2. When it does it occur, that occurrence is SUPPOSED to alarm us, like Mid-West sirens that a Cat 5 Hurricane is coming!
3. When this happens we feel the terrors of conscience...this is the normal Christian life.
4. And then what, we confess our sin and God who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1<sup>st</sup> John 1:9)
5. And then you go forth resisting sin like crazy...because that's not who you are Christian...you are now a child of God...this is the Christian life.

Our own Pastor Mueller edited a book entitled, "Called To Believe" and in his handling of this issue, he boiled the difference down to this: "having sin" vs. "committing sin." An ingenious simplicity and completely faithful to Scripture. We all have sin which is why we constantly confess it, we confess it every Sunday in Church and we confess it every day as we pray The Lord's Prayer, but as children of God *committing sin* is a different thing, a strange thing, a foreign thing, and a thing that is no longer a part of our life. As Christians who love Jesus, we hate sin. And when it occurs, we mourn...and what we do not do is justify it or hold to it...when it occurs, it produces terror in our hearts..."sinful man that I am, who will save me from this body of death?!" (Ro 7) And God leads us to the only answer: our Lord Jesus who forgives us all of our sin...and then the cycle begins again, but remember today's focus and the particular place of the cycle...as we go forth...as you will go forth filled with Christ's body and blood for the forgiveness of sins...remember

who you are: you are a child of God...so the idea to keep on sinning is out of the question. That's not who you are. This is a status that is more than worth fighting for because the day is coming as you continue in the forgiveness of sins over and above the permission to sin, you "know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is." (1<sup>st</sup> John 3:2) The pure one who kept you pure...His blood covering your sin; His life filling you...His Spirit making you see sin as your worse enemy...it no longer defines you. That's not who you are. You – Christian – are a child of God. That is what you are.