

## 1 John 3:1-7 - "Children of God"

Pr. Kurt A. Van Fossan - Easter 2B 2021

Through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, St. John wrote our Epistle reading between 85 and 95AD. This was around 50 years after Jesus' death and resurrection, and even less time after what's referred to as the birth of the church on Pentecost. Yet even within this relatively short space of time, the "*children of God*" in the first century church were already being drawn away from the church by the demonic influences of society and false teachers who appealed to their sinful reason and their works-righteous or self-righteous tendencies.

Welcome to this fallen world! We see the same thing happening in the Christian church and this congregation today, and this is not child's play. It's the work of the devil who seeks our eternal death in hell with him. That's why, in the verse just after our text, John says that "*whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil.*" That's calling a spade a spade!

Who is it that makes a "*practice of sinning*"? All those who do not repent of their sins. While we are all sinners, there is a big difference between those who repent of their sins and come to the only God who can forgive us, and those who don't. One of the big differences is the one who is in control of their lives.

Who is in control of our lives when we don't repent of our sins, including our secret sins? Let's call a spade a spade. It's the work of the devil in us and around us, who rejects what God's Word says about the damning effect of sin and the saving effect of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

This work of the devil is against or anti God's Word. It's an anti-Christ. While the antichrist, Satan, may still be in prison if the time we're in is not the short season before Jesus' return on the Last Day (Matthew 24:15-21), God does tell us that there are many antichrists. Earlier, John said to his first century hearers, "*Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrist's have come*" (1 John 2:18). And sometimes he comes through us when our minds are not focused on "*the things of God but on the things of man.*" Remember when Peter rejected what Jesus said about His suffering and death. Jesus said to Peter, "*Get behind me, Satan!... For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man*" (Matthew 16:23).

There are many different ways a person can be opposed to or anti-Christ. Not only are we anti-Christ when we reject what God says in His Law and are therefore unrepentant, but just as serious is our rejection of what the Lord says about His forgiveness. The Lord is here today to give us His forgiveness not only when He uses my voice to tell you who repent of your sins, "*I forgive you all your sins,*" but He is also here, body and soul, to give you His forgiveness in a visible, tangible way. "*Touch me, and see*"... "*Take eat...drink...This is my body...this is my blood, given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins*" (Matt. 26:26-28). Our almighty Savior is here speaking to us through His Word and feeding us with His physical and eternal body and blood in the Lord's Supper to give us His forgiveness and eternal life, which we continue to need so desperately.

To reject this Good News, to say, for example, that the bread and wine of the Lord Supper merely “represents” His body and blood (which fits in better with our natural way of thinking), is to oppose the Word of God. It is an anti-Christ.

Think for a moment of how this antichrist teaching, which rejects Christ’s real presence in the Lord’s Supper, has led to the decline of church attendance over the years. Why meet together as a congregation to receive the Lord’s Supper or hear the Word of God, when I can read the Bible and enjoy some bread and wine at home? At home I can preach to myself about what God’s Word is talking about, and maybe spice up the bread and wine with some different cheeses while listening to my own choice of music, all without the interference of others (like the pastor, or those in the church I don’t get along with). Such antichrist thinking and teaching works to divide the church, and conquer/“devour” (1 Peter 5:8) the scattered lambs—the “*children of God*.”

One of the reasons St. John calls the members of the Church “*children of God*” is to remind us all that when it comes to fighting against the forces of evil—sin in us and around us—we are like helpless children. Apart from Christ and His body the church, we are no match for the power and deceptive ways of the devil.

That’s why the Son of God took on our flesh to save us through His death and resurrection, and continues to come to us through His Word and Sacraments to make and keep us His children forever. Whenever we think we are big and strong in our faith and life and can, therefore, manage on our own, we’re like this strong looking hand [throw it on the floor]. Separated from the head and body of the Church it will wither and die.

Do you know how many times the singular phrase, “child of God” is used in the Bible? Zero. Instead God consistently refers to us as “*children of God*.” “*See/ behold what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God*.” When God adopts us through His Word and the waters of Holy Baptism, we who are unworthy sinners become members of Christ and one another—the “*children of God*.”

Apart from our Lord who works in and through His Word and Sacraments as they are proclaimed and distributed through His Church, we can do nothing (including saving ourselves). But together God’s Word and Sacraments work in and through us to build and maintain His Church. Therefore, as I said last Sunday, let us not neglect “*to meet together, as is the habit of some,*” but encourage one another, “*and all the more as you see the Day drawing near*” (Hebrews 10:24-25). For this is the work of God for our salvation.

All glory be to God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

[Children’s Sermon] When you go outside to play, especially on a warm sunny day, do you get dirty and smelly? [Yes] So, what do your parents usually want you to do? [wash] How often do your parents want you to wash your hands or take a bath/shower? Do you ever complain about getting washed, because you don’t think you’re that dirty?

When you disobey you’re parents, you are disobeying God who works through your parents to help take care of you. That’s what sin is, saying no to God. Can you wash away your sins like you wash away the dirt on your hands? [No] That’s why God sent His Son, Jesus to die on the cross and rise from the dead, so that He could wash away your sins. That’s also why your parents brought you to church to be Baptized, for Jesus to wash away your sins and make you children of God.

So now, as children of God, you always obey your parents, right? No? Do you mean that you still sometimes disobey your parents and God? So what does God enable you, as children of God, to do? To come to God and say I’m sorry. Please forgiven me. And will God and your parents forgive you? [Yes].

How often do you think you need God to wash away your sins? [Every day] Here’s a bar of soap with a cross in it to remind you of the main reason we come to church with the rest of the children of God. For Jesus, who is here today, to wash away our sins.