

“That’s not very Christian of you”

Maybe you’ve heard these words sarcastically from a non-Christian friend when they were surprised that you joined them in having a drink, or they were shocked by what came out of your mouth—in their eyes you can see a gleeful glimmer as they’ve caught their Christian friend in this moment. Or maybe you’ve heard this from a brother or sister in Christ—if this is the case, maybe the tone is a little more disappointed or even condescending. Maybe even the words aren’t quite the same, instead they say “do you really think you should be doing that?” but the knife can certainly cut straight to the heart when we hear this. If the comment hasn’t come from an outsider, believer or not, I would venture a bet to say the thought has come from within. “How could I have done that?” or “Why am I still stuck in this?” as you see yourself seething with anger or bubbling with jealousy or overcome by lust. It’s almost as if there’s a second person living inside you, the Christian and the non-Christian fighting over the plays of your life, as Paul puts it in Romans 7.

But John makes statements in today’s lesson telling us that such a struggle isn’t allowed. “No one who abides in Him [that is, Jesus] keeps on sinning. No one who keeps on sinning has either seen Him or known Him.” This is bad news, affirming what your friend, or your fellow Christian, or your own conscience has said to you. That sin isn’t very Christian of you—it’s not very Christ-like.

And yet by these standards, the only person who is capable of keeping Himself in the salvation club is Jesus our Saviour Himself. Did our God send us a salvation that we are incapable of clinging to? Have we been saved by grace only to find ourselves in a salvation that must be maintained by works, works beyond what we are able to do?

We are called God’s children now. Because of the love that He has shown to us, He has called us, and thus we are, God’s children. But it is true—we do not

appear as God's children. Sin persists. Our bodies decay. We do not yet appear to be perfect, everlasting saints.

Which is no surprise to John as He acknowledges that we have not yet seen the returned Lord. But in that day, at that time, what Christ died and rose to turn us into, that which the Word has preached into your hearts to believe in spite of what you see, when your Lord returns, finally the old Adam, with his sin and death clinging around your neck, he will be cast from you never to threaten you again. Today we must take Easter by faith; on that day you will believe Easter by sight.

But until then, in order to make it until then, we must not keep on sinning. That is we must not make a practice of sinning.

I understand that you must practice your free throws to be good at basketball, and I had to attend band practice to get better at trumpet. I also know that I don't love that lawyers practice law and doctors practice medicine. In my mind, by the time they are standing before you in court, or by the time they've sliced you open and are poking at your kidneys they should be beyond practicing.

But here lies a stark difference in definition. We practice something to get better at it, and we practice other things like a way of life, in certain routines and manners.

We ought not practice sin and lawlessness in either way, just as we ought to practice righteousness in both manners.

Jesus has died. The Gospel has been preached to you and you have found yourself by the grace of God believing it! So your sins have been blotted out, stolen from you and in their place the righteousness of Christ lives. Therefore you are righteous just as He is righteous.

Therefore you ought to practice this righteousness—like it's your way of being. It ought to be the habits you cycle through, the way you think and speak and act. It must be how you identify and even see yourself—I am righteous, I am beloved, I am a called and baptized child of God, you might say. And thus like a doctor practices medicine, from reading the charts to scrubbing in to following the

exact procedure to make sure your lungs are breathing well, so you read your Bible, you pray, and you love your neighbours as the opportunity arises. This is to practice righteousness.

You will not get it right. Not all the time, and never perfectly. But that doesn't mean we shouldn't try.

It is not the life we are called to as Christians, to live resigned to the sin that clings to us until death. It is not right to say “whelp, I'm a sinner, so there's no chance I'll do anything right today” and then just indulge in whatever sin crosses our minds. That would be to practice sin, to practice lawlessness, to see it as your way of life, and then in fact to get better and better and better at it! And this apathetic attitude towards the harm of sin and the beauty of righteousness is what John is writing against. You know that Christ has died for you and risen for you—this is good and right and your only hope. But if you hear that and then see that as license to sin more, or if you see the continued state of your sin and claim that any other life, this side of the grave, is hopeless, that is to ignore Christ and Him living in you; that is not to hope in Him and to be purified as He is pure.

As Christians, those who are given salvation, whose sins are blotted away and who by their hope in Christ are made pure, those who are called Children of God and righteous and truly are, we are invited to practice righteousness in our lives.

While practicing righteousness as a straightforward way of life like a doctor, practicing it as something we've accomplished and fully grasped, this does not happen perfectly on this side of our death, we can practice it like a student learning arithmetic or piano or how to slapshot.

Because your Lord has died, blotting off all the sins that stained you as He suffered and bled on the tree, you no longer have to live perfectly—that is, you don't have to worry whether your service to those in need, your care to those who are suffering or grieving, your love to shown your family and friends and

neighbours and strangers alike, you don't have to fret whether you'll get it right on the first try. You can practice.

Hear the commands and think about where you can put them into action in your own life. How can I honor my parents today? It is wonderful to resist the temptation to grumble against them, but can I call them or say a prayer of thanksgiving for them—and not just for your parents, but for your teacher or boss or government? I shouldn't steal, nor should I covet—excellent! Do your best to resist the temptation to drool over your neighbour's new car or the pictures you see online of nicer houses than your own, but could you also work the positive of the command into your day? Can you purchase some groceries to donate to the food bank? Can you help a charitable organization in their renovation to serve their clientele? Don't misuse the name of the Lord your God—hold your tongue back from saying “Oh my...” yes, but can you also read His Word and ask Him teach you and guide you? Can you thank Him for your daily bread or call upon Him to intercede for those in need?

None of these practices get you into heaven. And yes, due to your sin, none of them will ever be sinless on this side of everlasting life. But these practices, or what the church called disciplines, they are a genuine way to live as God's children. They guide us to live a life like Christ our Lord, with our eyes turned away from ourselves, our faces turned to God and our neighbour. And they cause us to see the sin that persists as we struggle and even fail to fulfill these practices, and that ongoing sin drives us to constant repentance—that is, hoping in Christ and becoming pure just as He is pure. And by His grace, some of these disciplines, these practices, they actually do bless the world around you and they do glorify your Lord.

Christ your Lord is risen—He has alive with life everlasting for you. And although you, children of God, you cannot see it, not fully yet at least, you have this gift of life to live out through your days, and one day—by His grace and His promise, you will enjoy this perfect life where sin and death is no more, when at

last you be just as He is because you see your Lord face to face in the joys of life unending.

In His Name.

Amen