*Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our heavenly Father, through the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.*

**1 John 3:1-7** (EHV)

1 See the kind of love the Father has given us that we should be called children of God, and that is what we are! The world does not know us, because it did not know him. 2Dear friends, we are children of God now, but what we will be has not yet been revealed. We know that when he is revealed we will be like him, and we will see him as he really is. 3Everyone who has this hope purifies himself just as Jesus is pure.

4Everyone who commits sin also commits lawlessness. Sin is lawlessness. 5You know that he appeared in order to take away our sins and in him there is no sin. 6Anyone who remains in him does not sin. The person who keeps on sinning has not seen him or known him.

7Dear children, do not let anyone deceive you. Whoever does what is right is righteous just as Jesus is righteous.

*Dear Heavenly Father, send your Holy Spirit upon us so that we may live as your righteous children who have been adopted through faith in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.*

If you’ve ever been to an animal rescue facility, you may have noticed some animals who have been badly treated in the past.

They’re usually the ones cowering at the back of the shelter; shaking, whimpering and fearful. They may have sores or scabs on their body, their coats may be matted or bare, and you might easily see their rib cages.

Out of compassion for these abused and previously uncared-for creatures, some people willingly adopt these rescue animals, but to do so will test their patience, compassion, and perseverance. You see, what they’ve learnt in the past can take some time to undo.

For example, if you approach one of these animals who have been abused or neglected with a loud voice, or with a stick in your hand, or with a raised arm, you might see the animal shake, whimper, run away, or soil themselves. On occasions they might get defensive by barking, snarling, hissing, or biting.

However, with much care, gentleness, reassurance, compassion, and perseverance, these animals might learn to be happy, obedient, and loving. Your persistent care, love, and patience for these abused and neglected creatures might earn you their respect, and loyalty. Through your gentle care, they might learn how to relate to people once more in a healthier and positive way.

Now, if this is how animals can respond when we adopt them into a caring and loving environment, what do you think your own response would be when you’ve been adopted by God as his dearly loved children?

As you live in the security and protection of your loving God who grants you forgiveness of all your sins, cleansing from past abuse, rescue from your enemies, nourishment for your faith through his Word and precious Sacraments, peace and fellowship with himself and his holy people, and the promise of eternal life after death, wouldn’t you think your own behaviours might change as you learn to live as God’s precious and dearly loved children?

You don’t live a new healthier way simply because this is the way you might earn your way into God’s good books. You’re already in his good books because of what Jesus Christ, his own dearly beloved Son, has done for you through his bitter suffering, vicarious death, and his glorious resurrection. You’ve already been adopted into God’s own holy family, and you’ve already been forgiven, cleansed, saved, and promised life eternal. Nothing you do can make God love you any more or any less.

But, as God’s dearly beloved children who constantly receive his forgiveness, care, and protection; as children who listen carefully and attentively to his holy Word which defines how to live in God’s righteousness and holiness; and as children who receive grace upon grace, surely a bit of God’s goodness and graciousness would rub off on you!

Now you might be thinking it already does, and maybe this is so.

It could be that people can see how you live differently to everyone else. They can see you live and love and forgive and serve as dearly loved children of God. It could be you no longer have any of those self-protective behaviours by which you’d snap and snarl at those who threaten you. It could be you no longer whimper or whinge or cry or throw tantrums in order to get what you want. It could be you’re no longer selfish and self-seeking and you willingly and generously give of your time, energy, and money for the sake of God’s kingdom.

It could be you’re able to forgive all those who offend and trouble you. It could be you don’t need people’s attention because you know you already have God’s attention and that’s all you need. It could be you’re not afraid of what people think or say or do to you because you already have all the love, approval, and care from your heavenly Father, which is enough for you. It could be you’re already living a righteous life just as Jesus Christ is righteous.

But it could also be that you struggle to live this way.

It could be your old habits of self-protective behaviours, selfish attitudes, and your desires for justice from those around you still keep rising from the dead to haunt you. You might still snap and snarl and bite back at those who hurt you. You might struggle to forgive your enemies. It could be you’re not as righteous in your actions, words, and thoughts as God expects.

Just to show how serious this is, if we were to read a little further in John’s letter, we’d hear him say:

*The one who continues to sin is of the Devil, because the Devil has been sinning from the beginning. This is why the Son of God appeared: to destroy the works of the Devil. Nobody who has been born of God continues to commit sin, because God’s seed remains in him. He cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God. This is how the children of God and the children of the Devil are obvious: Everyone who does not do what is right is not from God, along with everyone who does not love his brother.* 1 John 3:8-10

This means, if we’re struggling to love our brothers and sisters in Christ, even though they may have hurt us deeply, then we’re not of God. If we’re not constantly doing what’s right and good according to God’s Word, then we’re not of God. If it’s not obvious that we’re of God through our righteous thoughts, words, and actions, then we could be accused of being of the Devil!

And yet, how many of us continue to struggle to forgive those who sin against us? How many of us struggle to live according to God’s righteous ways? How many of us live no differently than those around us who don’t know the love and peace and joy and hope of having faith in God?

If the choice is between being children of the Devil and children of God, the answer would be pretty obvious! But, if we’re honest with ourselves, we all struggle to live as righteous children of God in all our thoughts, words, and deeds!

How can we then live according to these verses? How can we live in righteousness? How can we forgive those who hurt us? How can we demonstrate we’re truly children of God by the way we live out our faith every day?

Well, let’s think back to the analogy of a rescue animal. If the abused or neglected animal is still controlled by fear, the animal won’t change its old behaviours. On the other hand, as the animal learns to trust the new master’s love and compassion, the animal will learn healthier behaviours.

Therefore, the answer for us is to no longer be led by the old masters of our own fears and desires, which always lead to sin. The answer for us is to trust our loving heavenly Father and be led by his love and righteousness.

While fear controls you, while selfishness controls you, while your desires control you, while past hurts control you, and while you continue to trust yourselves and your own well-practiced unhealthy protective behaviours, your faith won’t be obvious to anyone because the old sinful nature will continue to rule your lives.

On the other hand, as you learn to trust your loving heavenly Father who supplies all your needs for your bodies, hearts, minds, and souls, then you may learn to live as righteous children of God whom he has called you to be.

You see, despite the fact God knows how deeply imbedded your sinful behaviours are, he still chose to adopt you as his own dearly loved children anyway. Instead of refusing to forgive you in the vain and futile hope you’ll ever change your ways and repent, he willingly sacrificed his own dearly beloved Son as full payment for your sin. Even though he knows how much the abuse and neglects of your past continue to scar you, he still chooses to love you, support you, and nourish you so you may live a new life of hope and peace and love.

Because God loves you, he adopted you as his children. This means if God says you’re his children, then that’s who you are. If God says you’ve been reborn, then that means your old nature has died and you’ve been raised to live with him in righteousness, innocence, and blessedness. If God says you’re forgiven and made holy through the blood of Jesus, then you’re now innocent and holy in God’s sight.

But, since the old nature with all its doubts and fears keeps wanting to entrap you in your old sinful nature, you need to constantly repent and believe. There’s a need to keep drowning the old nature *every day* and look to God’s holy provisions to strengthen your faith *every day*.

As children of God, you no longer want your old selfish life of sin and selfishness to rule your lives. As reborn Christians, you reject your own sinful natures and desire to grow in the righteousness of Christ, which is credited to you through faith in Jesus. As children of God, you learn to forgive as you’ve been forgiven by Christ himself.

You forgive, not because anyone deserves your forgiveness, but simply because this is how children of God love and live. You forgive those around you because this is the way God forgives you. Your new loving and forgiving nature isn’t dependant on anyone else’s words or works (or lack of them). Your loving and forgiving nature is totally dependent on the words and work of your Triune God who continues to forgive you, love you, nourish you, and support you.

Fellow children of God, if rescue animals can learn new behaviours based on their new master’s love and compassion, then how much more can you learn to live a new life as children of the Triune God! After all, you’ve been rescued by your heavenly Father so that you may live a new life of faith and hope and love in his eternal kingdom of grace, which is why…

*…the peace of God, which surpasses all human understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.*

Pastor Stuart Kleinig

South Western Queensland Lutheran Parish – Chinchilla Ministry Area

3rd Sunday of Easter

14th April 2024