

Two Families, Two Likenesses

1 John 3:4-10 Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness. ⁵ And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin. ⁶ Whoever abides in Him does not sin. Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him. ⁷ Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous. ⁸ He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil. ⁹ Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God. ¹⁰ In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother.

Whenever we do a baby dedication, I make sure that I point out that a baby dedication imparts no saving grace. I'll remind everyone that the baby is unsaved, and remains unsaved after the dedication. This is no new doctrine. David says:

Psalm 51:5 Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me.

Psalm 58:3 The wicked are estranged from the womb; They go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies.

Genesis 8:21 And the LORD smelled a soothing aroma. Then the LORD said in His heart, "I will never again curse the ground for man's sake, although the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; nor will I again destroy every living thing as I have done.

The Bible is clear we are sinners from birth. We are born into Adam's family (Rom 5:12). No one is born saved. No one is born regenerated. I believe God chooses to regenerate infants that die in the womb or before they become sinners in their own right, but that doesn't mean every child is born regenerated. If that were the case, no one would need the gospel.

However, this sometimes rubs some people the wrong way. They can't believe that a baby is not somehow a Christian. After all, the parents are Christians. The child has been born into a Christian nation. So they hope to invent some kind of special category for the child. Christian-to-be, or Christian-in-waiting, or Christian-to-be-confirmed. And if you had to nail them down and ask them, is this baby regenerated? Is this baby, right now, a child of God, they would have to choose an answer. Either he or she is, or he or she isn't. There is no in-between category, no halfway house, and no partially regenerated category. If he is a Christian, how did he get that way? What Scripture is there to say that people are regenerated by the faith of another person? If he is not, then what is he? He is unregenerate. In time to come, he will be an unbeliever – actively denying the truth of the Word, but according to Scripture, right now he is clearly unsaved, unregenerate, and therefore, a non-Christian.

A failure to grasp this truth is a failure to accept what the Bible says about how many spiritual families there are in the world. In fact, this passage in John confronts us with all the spiritual families in the world.

Verse 10 tells us just that:

In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest:

Jesus has made it clear that there are only two spiritual families in the world: God's family and Satan's family.

Matthew 13:38 "The field is the world, the good seeds are the sons of the kingdom, but the tares are the sons of the wicked one.

John 8:44 "You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it."

Great damage has been done to the cause of the gospel by people who will not accept this black-and-white distinction that the Bible makes. Evangelism suffers, missions wanes and the church loses some of its relevance and power when it denies this clear, antithetical truth, you are either in God's family, or the devil's.

In this passage of Scripture, John is going to describe the family traits of both. A family trait is something that members of a family share. Often, when speaking about traits, we are talking about habits, mannerisms; ways of doing things that are repeated and noticeable in a family. This is what John is after here, and it is a vital key to unlocking this passage. For years, different groups have taken this passage to mean very different things, and it is because often interpreters fail to understand that what John is after is not isolated instances of behaviour, but repetitive, ongoing, habitual traits that mark you as belonging to one of the two families. The fact that my son might shout at table is an isolated, individual act, and isn't a family trait. However, if you see that he walks like I do, and stands like I do – that is a pattern of behaviour. It is a trait.

So what John is after here is to examine the family traits of the two families. Because you do some of these things doesn't qualify you to enter the family; it simply means you are in it. My son's walk doesn't make him my son; it reveals him to be my son. In the same way, these traits don't make you a child of the devil or a child of God – they reveal which family you are already in. This is another sign of life – if you have God's seed in you, the family likeness will show up. But if you have the fallen Adam's seed in you, that family likeness will show up.

I. The Devil's Family

a) It is a lawless family vv4-5

Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness. ⁵ And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin.

To explain - whoever commits, or as several other translations put it, *practises* sin, practises lawlessness, because sin is lawlessness. People in the Devil's family are habitually, and continually lawless.

What does that mean? It goes way beyond the issue of keeping the Law of Moses. God has always had some kind of Law for the ones He was working with. Adam and Eve had one law. Those after Adam's fall had the law of their conscience: Cain knew it was wrong to murder. Noah was given law after the flood. Moses and the nation Israel were given 623 laws. The New Testament Church is said to be under the law of Christ. Even the unbeliever, the book of Romans 2:14 tells us, are laws unto themselves, because their conscience accuses or excuses them. There has been, and always will be some kind of law – because a law is simply a reflection of authority.

And at root, Satan's heart is a lawless heart. Satan's fall, best as we can tell, was a rejection of God's authority. The root of Satan's philosophy is that he wants to be as the Most High in his own life. When he tempted Eve, he sold his own philosophy to her: ye shall be as gods. Reject God's authority for your own; be your own guide, your own law-maker.

All sin, at its heart, is a rejection of God's authority. We reject what He says is good for us, and

right, and set ourselves up as authorities. We choose the good and the right for ourselves. That's lawlessness.

When it characterises the life, it is a sign that the spiritual DNA, comes from the lawless one. Jesus said that on that last day:

Matthew 7:22-23 "Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' 23 "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'"

So John goes on to say this:

And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin.

You know two things : Jesus came to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin. The sinless Saviour came to save us from sin, not leave us in it.

Titus 2:14 who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.

John 1:29 ¶ The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"

2 Corinthians 5:21 For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

If you habitually practise sin, then you are habitually lawless. And Christ came to deliver people from that. So if you are habitually like what He came to deliver you from, then perhaps you are not delivered.

This is an important family likeness: your attitude to authority. Jesus Christ, when on earth, kept submitting to His Father's authority. On the other hand, when Peter and Jude want to warn us about false teachers, what do they mention?

Jude 1:8 Likewise also these dreamers defile the flesh, reject authority, and speak evil of dignitaries.

2 Peter 2:10 and especially those who walk according to the flesh in the lust of uncleanness and despise authority. They are presumptuous, self-willed. They are not afraid to speak evil of dignitaries, ¹¹ whereas angels, who are greater in power and might, do not bring a reviling accusation against them before the Lord.

1 Peter 2:17 Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.

That's why Paul told us not to be unequally yoked with unbelievers.

2 Corinthians 6:14 Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?

b) It is an alienated family v6

v6 Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him.

Now ask yourself this question: does John mean acts of individual sin, or a practice of sin? If it means individual acts of sin, then according to this verse, who is actually a Christian? No one. No, once again, John does not mean who ever sins at any one time has neither seen nor known Him.

He means, whoever makes a lifestyle, a practice of sin, whoever sins habitually in the present, this person has not known Him or seen Him in the past. The verbs “seen” and “known” are in the perfect tense, implying that he has neither seen nor known God in times past, with the present result that He is still invisible and unknown to him.

What John is saying is that people who are in Satan's family have not come to know God. They have not seen Him spiritually – that is, they have never seen His beauty, His majestic and winsome and sweet beauty that draws you to Him. Those in Satan's family exist in a place of alienation. They are cut off from Him. They do not know Him. Some of them say they believe in Him. Some of them deny He exists. Some of them hate the thought of Him, and actively blaspheme Him. Some of them like the idea of certain aspects of God. Whatever the case, they do not know Him as a child knows a Father. They have not seen His beauty and loved it.

James 2:19 You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe -- and tremble!

Ephesians 4:17-19 This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, ¹⁸ having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; ¹⁹ who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.

The reason people sin, is because they do not know Him or see Him. The clearer you see Him, and the more you know Him, the less you will sin. Even for a believer, the times we sin are the times when we take our eyes off Him. But the person in the devil's family has never come to know God, and has never seen Him, and therefore, he or she makes a practise of sin.

c) It is a sinful family vv8, 10

He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.

Once again, does John mean individual acts of sin, or does he mean a lifestyle of sin? Well, if he means acts of sin, the second part of his sentence seems odd. “He who commits acts of sin is of the devil, for the devil has committed acts of sin from the beginning.” That's not what he's saying, is it? The devil has been sinning, *as a habit*, from the beginning. The devil first sinned when he fell in pride, and from that time, he has been sinning. His being is one of sin. He is called the Evil One. He lives in continual opposition to God.

So John says, if Satan's existence is one of continually doing what opposes God, what will his offspring do? They will continually sin.

Genesis 6:5 Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

In which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, ³ among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.

John then again tells us why Jesus came. Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil. His death and resurrection, when applied, put an end to the works of the devil.

Colossians 2:15 Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing

over them in it.

So if you habitually do the works of the devil, which He destroyed, then perhaps you have not experienced His powerful work. If the works of the devil are not being torn down in your life, but are in fact growing, you may have reason to question if you have been delivered from his family.

d) It is a malicious family v10

In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother.

Satan's family is a loveless family. I struggle to believe there is any love between Satan and his angels. There is probably great fear. If there is love, it is that kind which we most despise on earth, the kind of love that uses the thing or person it loves, a manipulative, rapacious, consuming kind of love. Those in Satan's family do not know real love. Yes, they can exhibit kindness. Yes, they can sacrifice for others. Yes, they can be sweet and congenial and nice. But they know nothing of loving in spite of themselves, beyond themselves. They cannot love someone else for God's sake, because they do not know God. If a relationship threatens self, that's where they draw the line. Therefore, Satan's family is filled with quarrels, strife and division. Mark the perpetually divisive person, because he or she is acting like a member of the devil's family.

So Satan approaches you, and takes out his wallet. And he says, "Want to see what my kids look like?" And he shows you. They look just like him. They hate authority and are lawless. They're blind and cut off from the beauty of God and live as if He weren't even there. They are full of sin, words and thoughts and deeds. And they despise one another. Lawless. Alienated. Sinful. Malicious.

Every human being who begins life on this earth starts out in Satan's family. But for some, a transformation can take place, and you can be born into a new family.

John 1:10-13 He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. ¹¹ He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. ¹² But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: ¹³ who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

So what does it look like when you are in God's family? What are the family likenesses of being in the family of God?

II. God's Family

a) It is a righteous family v7

Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous.

Look closely at what John does and doesn't say. He doesn't say you **become** righteous by practising righteousness. What does he say? He who practises righteousness **is** righteous, just as He is righteous. Those who are in the family of God bear the resemblance of God. God is righteous, Jesus Christ is the Righteous One (2:1). If you are in His family, then you have been declared righteous. On the day when you are born into his family, on the day when you pass from Satan's family into God's, you are declared righteous in God's sight. God forgives you of your sin, and credits you with Christ's righteousness.

What starts to happen is that the position begins to work its way into your practice. What you are,

is what you slowly become. Your position starts to become your practice.

1 John 2:29 If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him.

John says “Don't be deceived. Don't let anyone tell you otherwise. Don't believe the lie.” What would the lie be? It would be the lie that you can be righteous in your position but never become that way in practice. That was a common teaching in John's time, and it still is today. The Gnostics of John's time taught that you could live an immoral life as far as the body goes, but still be righteous in your soul. Some were teaching that Christians do not need to be under any authority- they are free from all constraints.

1 Corinthians 6:9 ¶ Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites,

Ephesians 5:6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.

It is not that those in God's family only do acts of righteousness. They also do acts of sin. But what is coming to characterise their lives as a whole, is a practice of righteousness. What is coming to characterise them is a desire to please God in all that they do.

a) It is a sin-less family v6, 9

Look at verse 6 and verse 9, probably the toughest verses of the whole section:

Whoever abides in Him does not sin.

Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God.

One more time, is John talking about individual acts of sin, or is he talking about a practice of sin? Well, try those verses out with the idea of acts of sin. “Whoever abides in Him does not commit acts of sin.” “Whoever has been born of God does not commit acts of sin, for His seed remains in him, and he cannot commit acts of sin, for he has been born of God.” Now think about it. Who is born of God? Every Christian. If John is talking about acts of sin, then it means that once you have been born of God, you cannot commit any acts of sin. Once born again, you are unable to commit any sins whatsoever. Does that agree with 1:9? Or with 2:1? So what is John talking about? He is once again talking about habits, lifestyles – family traits. Those in God's family do not practise sin (v6 & v9). Those in God's family cannot make a practice of sin. Does that mean they do not sin? No. They do sin. That's why John tells us that true Christians confess their sins. It means those in God's family are sinning less and less. Sin is not something they are practising and doing more of. It is something they are doing less of. They are not sinless. But they do sin less.

John gives you two reasons why God's children sin less and less.

- 1) **They abide in Him.** They are positioned in Christ. Because they are in Christ, a new life flows through them.

2 Corinthians 5:17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

- 2) **God's seed abides in them.**

Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God.

Galatians 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

God's life has taken root in you, and it is impossible that something as great as the very nature of God should be implanted in you, and you continue to live in opposition to God.

Matthew 7:18 "A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit."

Why do Christians sin less and less? Because they are in Christ, and Christ is in them. They in Christ means all that He is, is imputed to them and they can access that position by faith. Christ in them means His life and nature dwells in you by His Spirit and keeps intermingling with your spirit, transforming you to be like Him as you take in the Word and yield to Him. They have a supernatural position: in Christ. They have a supernatural possession: Christ in them.

Now that's a brief snapshot of Christ's family portrait. They are righteous as He is righteous. They are sinning less and less. They do not make a practice of sin, because they are in Christ and Christ is in them.

So the question that is before you today is, what family are you in? If someone who knows you had to compare your lifestyle with these two families, on which side of the album would they put you? Lawless? Blind and ignorant of God? Sinful? Malicious? Or righteous in position and increasingly in practice? Sinning less and less because of a supernatural position and possession?

If you find yourself on the wrong side, remember that one can become a member of the family of God through faith in Jesus Christ.

John 1:12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: