

Family Patterns

1 John 3:4-10

Introduction

In the last verse of chapter 2 John began stressing the significance of true believers being born of God. *Christianity is not merely a religious ceremonial tradition or ethical code. It requires new birth, regeneration, being born again, the life of God in the soul of man.* Only the powerful effect of God's life in us through the Holy Spirit can create the kind of transformation we need. For us to be rescued from our sin, we have to do more than just turn over a new leaf. We need a change of disposition of heart, a transformation at the level of desire.

The false teachers trying to deceive John's readers lacked this fundamental change. They were big on what they claimed to know, but they tended to ignore the significance of one's core identity and the resulting life patterns. They redefined sin or accommodated it or minimized it as unimportant compared to their so-called superior enlightenment and knowledge.

John intensely desires his readers not to be deceived by this fraudulent version of Christianity—as we will see him state in verse 7 of our text this morning. So he hammers

away at how you can tell the difference between a genuine born again believer and a fake Christian.

⁴ Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. ⁵ You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. ⁶ No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. ⁷ Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. ⁸ Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. ⁹ No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God. ¹⁰ By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.

It's easy to get lost in John's repetitive style here, so to understand well what this passage is teaching, we need to make some preliminary observations.

First, notice that right in the middle of our passage, John reveals what his purpose is for the warnings here. Verse 7: Little children, let no one deceive you.

“Little children” (*teknia*) emphasizes our status as a born one of a parent, versus the word for children that refers to being under the authority of a parent.

This is a section designed to give discernment to his readers so that they can tell the difference between the children of God and the children of the devil (v. 10).

Everyone, no one, whoever

The key issue has to do how the two families deal with sin.

Sin, sins, sinning—ten times

What John is teaching here cannot mean that anyone who still sins at all is not a child of God. John has already taught us in chapter one that someone who says he has no sin or that he has not sinned is a liar. Born again Christians regularly confess their sins to be forgiven and cleansed from all unrighteousness in keeping with John’s teaching in chapter 1—justified, declared righteous. But our seeking to be justified through the blood of Christ does not mean we

are okay with sinning. We are at war with it. We want to be free from its guilt and power.

John uses the verb, "to sin," in the present tense, indicating ongoing action. That's why our translation uses words like "practices sin" or "keeps on sinning." It's a characteristic pattern, not an occasional fall.

At the beginning, John tells us something about the nature of sin.

The term itself refers to falling short, underscoring sin as failure. But sin is more than failure or weakness. John notes that to practice sinning is to practice lawlessness. Sin is lawlessness.

1 John 3:4

Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness.

So sin is not just failure. It is also rebellion against God's moral law. God defines what is right and wrong, so when I practice doing wrong I am not just failing to do right, I am also rejecting God's lawful rule over my life. That has bearing on my true allegiance, my family connection.

One more observation. In our western culture we are used to the straight-line logic that we find in Paul's epistles. John's way of communicating here is not western or Greek

logic style. It is Semitic, developing the ideas in Hebrew teaching style—repetitive, circular.

Such an approach appreciates the impact of repetition on learning. It's as if John is inscribing the truth on our minds, running a deep groove in our thinking, much the way Deuteronomy 6 describes teaching the words of God diligently to our children—engraving them on their hearts over and over again throughout the day.

With this backdrop let's explore the themes John is teaching here about the relationship between whose child we are and the practices that rise from our spiritual genetic identity. Family Patterns.

1. Portrait of God
2. Portrait of the Children of God
3. Portrait of the Children of the Devil

We still use the saying, "like father, like son," to acknowledge how similar children are to their parents in their characteristic behavior.

So first, consider the portrait John gives us of God the Son, Jesus Christ, and of God the Father.

1. Portrait of God

What is God actually like—in contrast to what human beings may imagine Him to be? (idols)

What are hallmark features of His character that we would expect to see in His true children.

In these verses John refers to God's character and God's work as revealed in the life of the Lord Jesus Christ, God the Son.

His Character

Negatively—1 John 3:5 In him there is no sin.

This set Jesus apart from every other human being who ever lived and marked Him as the unique Son of God. The good news of the gospel is completely dependent on this reality. *If Jesus were not sinless, He could not have paid for our sin. He would have had to pay for His own.* He would have been disqualified from taking our place. Our hope of salvation is entirely dependent on Jesus being the spotless Lamb of God.

His sinlessness was at the level of His very identity. His actions flowed from His character—just as our actions and words flow from what's actually in our heart. We do what we are.

Positively—1 John 3:7 He is righteous. Righteousness speaks of meeting the standard of God's definition of what is right.

Jeremiah predicted that the coming Messiah, the Savior-King would be called, "The Lord our righteousness."

Jeremiah 23:5-6

⁵ Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. ⁶ In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: "The LORD is our righteousness."

His Work (consistent with his character)

1 John 3:5 He appeared in order to take away sins.

To lift up and carry away

Remember John the Baptist's public introduction of Jesus, "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world."

Jesus did not come to gloss over our sin or to affirm it. He came to remove it from our lives.

Anyone who continues to practice it or to affirm it or to minimize its significance (as did the Gnostics) is working against the very reason Jesus came to earth.

We confess our sins because they are a big deal to us, and we look to Jesus to clear them from our record, our conscience, and our lives.

1 John 3:8 The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.

This is the first time in this letter that John has used this title for Jesus, pointing to His exalted nature and power as God the Son, who alone is capable of taking on the devil and conquering him.

Destroy—to loose or to dissolve (unravel; falls apart; undone)—Jesus rendered the devil’s works inoperable, depriving them of their force.

Satan hates God, and he hates humans. In his temptation of Eve in the Garden, Satan dishonored God and tried to destroy humanity. A liar and a murderer.

Jesus broke Satan’s tyranny over us. This was the objective of His coming to earth, and He succeeded.

No one who belongs to Jesus as a child of God would want to turn power back over to the devil, His arch enemy. Jesus has freed children of God from Satan’s power over them. We are no longer bound to darkness. Once you’ve been free, you don’t want to be a slave again (why Ukraine is so resistant to Russia’s invasion).

Take your ideas of how you should live your life from the character and work of Jesus, your Savior and Lord. He revealed the Father's holy nature and righteous purposes. *If you are truly born again, your heart resonates with God's character and Christ's mission. You have no desire to work at cross purposes to your Savior-King.*

In your battle against sin remember the personal attack sin is on Jesus. Think on Him. Let love for Him inspire your courage and strength. Connect everything to Him. If you don't care about Jesus and what He has done, check your birth certificate.

2. Portrait of the Children of God

1 John 3:6 No one who abides in Him keeps on sinning.

No one can stay close to Jesus and keep on sinning—it's too much at odds with who Jesus is.

In John 15 Jesus taught His disciples that if they would abide in Him, they would bear much fruit. The lack of godly fruit reveals that a person is not vitally connected to Jesus; not abiding in Him.

1 John 3:6 No one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him.

Some of the false teachers gained a following because they had been among those who saw Jesus with their own eyes, and thus they claimed to know Him. But their lifestyle marked them as those who perhaps had looked on Jesus, but had not really seen Him in terms of perceiving and understanding who He is. Their wicked lifestyle exposed their vaunted claim to knowing Him to be a lie.

1 John 3:7 Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous.

What a person is becomes apparent by what he actually does. "Actions speak louder than words." Even a child is known by his doings (Proverbs).

1 John 3:9 No one born of God makes a practice of sinning.

1 John 3:9 God's seed abides in him.

It is growing in the believer and taking over his life.

1 John 3:9 He cannot (is not able to) keep on sinning, because he has been born of God.

1 John 3:10 By this it is evident (manifest, appears) who are the children of God.

- Abides in Him
- Have seen Him and known Him
- Practices righteousness
- Born of God
- Children of God—righteousness, love

Do these descriptions fit you?
In what ways do people who know you see what God is like by observing your life patterns?

3. Portrait of the Children of the Devil

The devil has been sinning from the beginning—the works of the devil. The devil is for sinning not against it.

1 John 3:4 Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness. Sinning is not just failing to live up to what God created us to be. It is rebelling against God's law as rightful King of the Universe.

1 John 3:8 Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil. Such a person bears the genetic characteristics of the chief adversary of God Himself. Satan disguised as the serpent revealed his anti-God spirit, deceiving and tempting Eve to disobey God in order to have what Satan alleged would be more fulfilling than obeying Him. Making a practice of sinning reveals a heart that believes happiness is to be found in disobeying God rather than in obeying Him. This is Satanic thinking. And it can be found even among the most religious of people, armed with creeds, ceremonies, and knowledge.

John 8:44-47

44 You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies. **45** But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me. **46** Which one of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me? **47** Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God."

1 John 3:10 Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God. Doing right is the normal lifestyle of someone with God's life in him. When one's lifestyle is not characterized by righteous actions, he reveals that he does not have God's life in him. How could he?

1 John 3:10 Nor is the one who does not love his brother.

Love fulfills the demands of the law. Everything we should not do shows a lack of love for God or for our neighbor. Everything we should do is how true love expresses itself.

A person who does not practice righteousness is a person who lacks love, else he or she would do right. Love leads our hearts to do right toward our fellow human beings. Evil is by nature unloving.

With this statement, John will transition to how love marks those who are of God, and how hatred marks those who are of the evil one.

If you believe yourself to be a child of God through Jesus, in what ways can you show love to those around you—in your attitude, your words, and your deeds?

Conclusion

*What do you know God is like?
What was Jesus like?*

*Do your life patterns reflect God's character and work?
Or do they reflect the character and work of the devil?*

Family Patterns reveal reality.

(Communion)

Closing Song: O Great God

Discussion Questions

1. How is it helpful in our personal battles against sin to know that sin is not just failure, but is also rebellion against God's lawful rule?

2. Why is it important to distinguish between falling to sin on occasion versus making a practice of sinning?
3. What are some reasons the sinlessness and perfect righteousness of Jesus is important to a redeemed, born-again follower of Jesus?
4. What effect does Jesus redemptive work of taking away sin and of dismantling the works of the devil have on how we deal with sin in our own lives?
5. How does our abiding in Christ have the practical effect of interfering with our sinning?
6. How can a person make a practice of abiding in Christ?
7. Why would a child born of God recoil from siding with the devil by making a practice of sinning?
8. Why does John equate practicing righteousness with loving one's brother in verse 10?