

Family Resemblances

Introduction. One of the most important facts that we love about our children is that they look like us. This “family resemblance” means a lot. However, there is a different kind of “family resemblance” that means a lot to someone else.

In John’s first epistle, the apostle showed us the divine resemblance of a child of God using the phrase “born of God.” “Born” means that God has graciously conferred to obedient believers the nature and disposition of “children.” John writes to his “little children” in order to persuade them to put their faith in Christ and live a new life which is holy and consecrated to God.

You cannot be a true child of God without paying attention to this serious obligation, so we are going to study John’s six statements about being “born of God” and see if we have these “family resemblances.”

I. 1 John 2:29

- A. This is an obligation to do what is right or correct. We have great examples (Moses, Abraham, David, etc.), but we did not have a perfect example until Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:21).
- B. For John, being born of God and becoming His child means accepting as the standard for conduct the Father’s righteousness (1 John 2:6; 3:7; cp. Matthew 5:48). So righteous conduct is not a condition for being born again but a consequence of it. We are called to be apart from the world (1 Corinthians 15:34; 2 Corinthians 6:17; 2 Thessalonians 2:14).
- C. God wants us to have fellowship with Him (1 John 1:3-7; 2:1). God does care if we do right or wrong! He does not want us to sin. God has always treated man as if he were able to make the right choice (James 4:5).
 1. James 4:4 indicates that believers who are friends of the world are guilty of spiritual adultery. Although their love and devotion belong to God, they have fallen in love with the world.
 2. It is natural, therefore, to expect v. 5 (closely tied to v. 4 by “or” in the newer versions) to speak of God’s jealous longing for His people’s love (cp. Exodus 20:5; 34:14).

II. 1 John 3:9

- A. John’s statement here is strong and uncompromising.
 1. This seems to be in contrast to 1:8-2:1. However, this contrast fades when one realizes that John is talking about perpetual, habitual sin or a life of sin.
 2. The Christian will not habitually sin and will not make it their purpose to sin.
 - a) That is what the “new life” of a Christian means; we are no longer “servants of sin” (Romans 6:4, 12-18). Sin is active, but no longer reigns.
 - b) The habitual life is the one that demonstrates our character, not what we are on the “spur of the moment.”
 3. Our new life is incompatible with sin, and gives the Christian a hatred for sin in every shape, and an unceasing desire to resist it (Hebrews 1:9). Because one is born of God, and the seed abides in him (Luke 8:11; John 5:38; 1 Peter 1:23; 1 John 2:14), one cannot sin (Genesis 39:9;).

- B. In 1 John 3:10, John states that the differences between the children of God and the children of the devil should be manifest; that is, clearly seen.
 - 1. I am afraid we are losing our “obviousness.” Because of weakness, apathy, indifference, and sin, we start to look just like the world (1 John 2:15-17). We have to guard ourselves (1 Corinthians 10:12; 1 Peter 1:14-16).
 - 2. After Paul went through numerous warnings in 1 Timothy, he told him to “Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all” (4:15).

III. 1 John 4:7

- A. Most of our relationships are reciprocal, but this one was not (Romans 5:8).
 - 1. This love focuses on the one being loved. This love loves in spite of anything loving back. Jesus saw more potential in us than we do.
 - 2. The mark of a Christian in this new dispensation is love, which is demonstrated in the sacrifice which Jesus made and in the love we show (1 John 3:17-18).
- B. In the gospels, Jesus taught His disciples about love over 20 times. John spoke about either loving one another or loving God 22 times in 1 John. Why? I think it is because it is so hard for disciples to learn to love one another.
- C. We cannot tear one another down and put our own interests above others (Philippians 2:3-4). If we bite and devour each other, we are not born of God (Galatians 5:13-15). One of the principle precepts of bioethics, that all healthcare students learn, is, “First, do no harm.”
 - 1. Some Christians treat each other in a more hateful and spiteful way than they would non-Christians. As a result, churches split because of fussing and squabbling (cp. James 3:10).
 - 2. Love demands that Christians put aside pettiness and grumblings and set themselves to the task of building up the body of Christ and spreading the gospel to a dying world.

IV. 1 John 5:1

- A. Faith is the basic tenant of what we are (John 1:12-13; Romans 10:8-10).
 - 1. Believing in Jesus is a direct consequence of our having been born of God and therefore becomes a test or proof of that birth.
 - 2. Jesus could not be our Savior unless He were “the Christ.”
 - a) He could not reveal the way of salvation, except He were a prophet.
 - b) He could not work out our salvation, except He were a priest.
 - c) He could not confer salvation on us, except He were a king.
 - d) He could not be prophet, priest, and king, except He were the Christ.
- B. A person who does not believe will not follow Christ (Hebrews 11:1, 6). Belief involves trust, but it is much more.
 - 1. A study of Hebrews 11 will show you that godly people acted on their faith (Habakkuk 2:4; James 2:18-24).
 - 2. Learning and studying facts prompts our trust in God, which in turn prompts us to action. And then, according to v. 2, our faith in Christ and love for our brethren are inseparably tied to one another.

V. 1 John 5:4

- A. We do not need any big commentaries or wise men to explain to us what this verse means: faith wins.
 - 1. Through our faith in God the world does not seem so big and powerful (John 16:33; Revelation 17:14). This is a continuous victory because it is a continuous struggle.
 - 2. Our faith in Jesus Christ is shown by our confession (v. 1) and by our life (v. 2). John emphasized the connection between loving God and keeping His commandments several times (1 John 2:3, 5; 3:22; John 14:5, 21; 15:10).
- B. The keeping of God's commandments are not grievous or burdensome (v. 3).
 - 1. This means that obedience to God does not cause a burden on the one who fulfills His commandments (Matthew 11:30).
 - a) It is easy to obey God when the heart is right, and those who endeavor to keep His commandments do not complain that they are difficult.
 - b) A heart in love with the world is ill-fitted to appreciate the benefits of living according to the gospel.
 - 2. The child of God who wants to be right with God will live by faith and not shrink back (Hebrews 10:38).

VI. 1 John 5:18

- A. The evil one does not touch the one born of God (Romans 8:35-39).
 - 1. This means "to lay hold of or to grasp." One scholar defines "touch" as "to assault, in order to sever the vital union between Christ and the believer."
 - 2. John is aware of the difficulties involved in opposing the evil one. But he is adamant in his confidence that the evil one need not prevail.
 - 3. The devil cannot snatch such a one from Christ (John 6:37-39; 17:12, 15). Stand against the devil and he will flee from you (James 4:7)!
- B. We must be so careful because the "whole world lieth in wickedness" (2 Corinthians 2:11; 11:13-15). The Son of God has come to give understanding, and this understanding allows us to live for an eternity with God (1 John 5:11-12).

Conclusion. Just like my father on earth, I am marked with a family resemblance. That is the way we should be with our heavenly Father (1 John 3:1-2). If we cannot reconcile ourselves to these statements, we are not born of God.

Why do you think we spend so much time speaking about divorce and remarriage, immodest dress, smoking, social drinking, mixed swimming, cursing, gambling and all kinds of worldly matters? Why do you think we spend so much time teaching about caring for one another and trying to build each other up? It is because we are to be a peculiar people who are not conformed to the world (1 Peter 2:9-10). As citizens of a new dispensation, we are not to cling to this sinful world, for it is destined to pass away (2 Peter 3:11).

Being born of God means that we should look like our Father. At one time, children of royalty were told that they could not do something because they were children of the king. It has to be the same way with us; we walk with the King! Do we want to recoil in shame at His coming (1 John 2:28)?