

## The Family Likeness of Righteousness

### 1 John 3:1-10

1 John 3:1-3 - *“Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. <sup>2</sup> Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. <sup>3</sup> And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.”*

#### Background Notes

“I’m so glad I’m a part of the family of God!” What a great song - and what a great truth! The great truth that we are children in the family of God is brought before us in these verses. *“Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God.”* Just think of it - if you’re a believer, you’re not only a forgiven sinner - you have been brought into God’s family! No wonder John says, *“Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us.”* God loves us so much that He has brought us into His family! This is fantastic truth! We’ve been saved out of this world and born into the family of God.

And it gets even better! Verse 2: *“Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him.”* Right now we’re in God’s family - but you can’t tell that just by looking at us. However, when the Lord returns believers will have new resurrection bodies. We will be like Him - morally like our Lord Jesus. We will have sinless bodies.

Philippians 3:21 says that our present lowly bodies will be transformed and conformed to His glorious body. Think that through. There are many implications there. We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. I’m so glad that when I see the Lord face to face, I will be in my sinless body!

By the way, our sinless resurrection state will not be like Adam’s state before the Fall. Before the Fall, Adam was sinless - but he was able to sin. In Heaven, we will not only be sinless, but we will be ***unable to sin!*** We will be like Him!

In that coming day, it will be quite obvious who is in the family of God. However, there should be some evidence of family membership even now - if you’re truly a believer. And that’s what this chapter is all about. If you’re in the family of God, there should be evidence of family likeness.

We use expressions “like father, like son” and “a chip off the old block” when we observe similar expressions and mannerisms in a father and his son. In the same way, if we are in the family of God, we should exhibit family traits or family likeness. In fact this family likeness is a test of true Christian fellowship. The first “likeness” is **righteousness**.

## Doctrinal Point

### The family likeness of “righteousness” is a test of Christian fellowship.

<sup>1</sup> John 3:4-10 - *“Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness.”* <sup>5</sup> *And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin.* <sup>6</sup> *Whoever abides in Him does not sin. Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him.*

<sup>7</sup> *Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous.* <sup>8</sup> *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.* <sup>9</sup> *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.* <sup>10</sup> *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.”*

Notice that the family likeness of righteousness is more than just a family resemblance. It’s one of the tests of Christian fellowship. If you’re practicing righteousness, it’s evidence that you’re a true believer. If you pass the test of Christian fellowship, you really are in the family of God. On the other hand, if you’re not practicing righteousness, but are living in sin, then it’s evident that you are only a professing to be a Christian. You’re not a true believer if you fail the test of Christian fellowship. You’re not in the family of God.

Under this Doctrinal Point there are two obvious sub-points:

#### **a. Those who practice sin fail the test.**

Verse 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.”*

What does this verse mean? It can’t mean that Christians are sinless - that would leave all of us out! And John would be contradicting himself, because in chapter 1, John was addressing believers when he wrote, *“If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us” (1:10).*

Then what's the meaning of verse 9? The answer is that John used the Greek present tense here. The Greek present tense implies "continuous action." So the idea here is that whoever is born of God does not **continue** to live a life of sin. A true believer does not **habitually** sin, or continually practice sin. Many Bible translations make this clear.

When you become a Christian, you are born into the family of God. You now have new divine life - and this seed remains in believers (v9). This new divine life is not only assurance of our eternal security, but is also the reason why a true believer will not live a life that is characterized by habitual sin.

Verse 6: "*Whoever abides in Him does not sin.*" Whoever abides in God does not keep on sinning - does not lead a life of sin - does not practice sin. If you claim to be a Christian but you're running an illegal business, or you have no control of a sinful thought life, or you're involved in an extra-marital affair, or you only do your own selfish thing, and you continually hate any kind of authority in your life - you are lawless at heart!

And, as verse 4 says, you should examine your heart to see if you really are a Christian. Have you, at some point in your life, truly committed yourself to the Lord Jesus Christ as your Personal Savior?

Those who practice sin fail the test of righteousness, and they are not in the family of God.

## ***b. Those who practice righteousness pass the test.***

Verse 7: "*He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous.*"

Let's start with the last phrase: "*He is righteous.*" To see what that means, go back to verse 5: "*In Him there is no sin.*" There is **no sin** in Jesus Christ! This is one of the three major Scriptures dealing with the absolute perfection of our Lord Jesus. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, "*He knew no sin.*" 1 Peter 2:22 says, "*He did no sin.*" And 1 John 3:5 says, "*In Him is no sin.*" The apostles Paul, Peter, and John all testify to the sinless perfection of Jesus Christ in these three wonderful and powerful Scriptures.

Back to verse 7: "*He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous.*" What does that mean? As we've already seen, it certainly doesn't mean that we can become sinless. When we put our trust in Jesus Christ as our personal Savior, we become Christians, we receive forgiveness of our sins and a "ticket to heaven." In addition, we are born into the family of God. And when we are born into the family of God, ***the new life that we receive is righteous***. In fact, 2 Peter 1:4 says that we are "*partakers of the divine nature.*" Thus the new life in us is righteous - "*just as He is righteous.*"

If we have new life that is righteous, then why do we still sin? We sin because we still have our fallen sinful nature - and we will continue to sin until we get our resurrection bodies in Heaven and our sinful nature is gone forever. But because we now have a new righteous life in Christ, we will not live a life of **habitual** sin. Our lives will not be **characterized** by sin. We will not practice sin - we will practice righteousness!

**Our lives will be characterized by wanting to do what is right.** If that is true in your life, you have passed the test. You're in the Christian fellowship for sure, because your life reflects the family likeness of righteousness.

Notice, by the way, that there is no middle ground with the apostle John. If you don't pass the test of righteousness, you're not in the family of God – in fact you are in the family of Satan! *“He who sins is of the devil” (v8)*. That means the person who habitually practices sin is of the devil. The beginning of verse 10 says, *“In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest.”* Practicing righteousness or practicing sin indicates out family membership! Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God - nor is he who does not love his brother.

So what about your life? Are you practicing righteousness or practicing sin? There is **no middle ground**. You are either a child of God or a child of the devil. The family likeness of righteousness is a test of Christian fellowship.

## Practical Application

### Always think of the Lord's return!

Verse 3: *“And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.”*

What “hope” is “this hope”? It's the “sure hope” of verse 2. We know that when Jesus Christ is revealed, *“we will be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.”* Verse 3 indicates that as we think of the Lord's return and of the changes that will take place in us *then*, there will be a sanctifying, or purifying effect on our lives *now*.

Try this experiment. Three times a day for the next week - maybe at meal times - think of the Lord's return and say, “Maybe the Lord will return today!” Try this for a week, and you'll see a purifying effect on your life as a believer. It may even revolutionize your life!

Always think of the Lord's return!