

FAMILY RESEMBLANCE

1 John 3: 4-10

As we've walked through **1 John**, John has been **answering** one important question: **What does genuine Christianity really look like?**

Step by step, John has been **pulling back** the **layers** of **authentic faith**. He has shown us that **genuine believers know Christ... walk in the light... abide in the truth...** and last week, he reminded us of the **FOUNDATION** beneath it all: **We are CHILDREN OF GOD.**

John wanted us to **understand** that **BEFORE** God ever **calls us to live** as His **CHILDREN**, He **FIRST makes us** His **CHILDREN**.

That naturally **raises the question** John **answers** in today's passage. **If we really are God's CHILDREN... Shouldn't our lives RESEMBLE our FATHER?**

We all understand the idea of **FAMILY RESEMBLANCE**. Children often look like their parents, sound like their parents, and sometimes even act like their parents.

Often, you can tell who **the FATHER or MOTHER is** simply by **LOOKING AT** the **CHILD**.

- John says the same thing is **TRUE SPIRITUALLY**.

The **CHILDREN OF GOD INCREASINGLY** bear the **family resemblance** of their **heavenly FATHER**. As **His life transforms us**, **His character** becomes **increasingly visible** in **ours**.

Not because **we are** trying to **BECOME** His **CHILDREN... BUT** because we **already are** His **CHILDREN**.

As we read this passage, we need to **ask ourselves** one question: **Does my life increasingly reflect the CHARACTER of my heavenly Father?**

- Our **conduct** doesn't **CREATE** our **identity**.
- Our **conduct REVEALS** our **identity**.

Let's read **1 John 3:4-10**.

1 John 3:4-10 (NASB 2020)

⁴ Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and 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 remains in Him sins *continually*; no one who sins *continually* has seen Him or knows Him.

⁷ Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous; ⁸ the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil.

⁹ No one who has been born of God practices sin, because His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin *continually*, because he has been born of God. ¹⁰ By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother *and sister*.

John's answer is **UNMISTAKABLE**. God's children **INCREASINGLY BEAR** their **Father's RESEMBLANCE**.

But before John shows us what God's children **LOOK LIKE**, he first reminds us of what we have **been saved from**. He begins by exposing the **true nature** of **sin**.

At its heart, **sin** is **NOT** merely a **behavior problem**—it is a **rebellion problem**.

1. Rebellion Reveals the Problem (vv. 4–6)

After reminding us that God's children increasingly **REFLECT** their **heavenly Father**, John begins with the **opposite reality**.

Before he describes the **character** of God's children... he reminds us of the **true nature of sin**. John wants us to understand that sin:

- It isn't merely a mistake.
- It isn't simply poor judgment.
- It isn't merely human weakness.

Sin is far more serious than that. It is **REBELLION** against **the authority** of God.

Let's look again at **verse 4**.

“Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness.”

John begins by giving us a **definition** of **sin**. If we **misunderstand** sin... we will **misunderstand WHY JESUS CAME**.

And if we misunderstand **why Jesus came**... we will misunderstand **what it means** to **FOLLOW** Him.

a) Sin Rejects God's Rule (v. 4)

John writes,

“Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness.”

The word translated “**lawlessness**” is the Greek word that means “**without law**.”

But John isn't simply saying that sin is **breaking** God's commandments. The idea runs much deeper. Sin is living as though **God has no rightful authority over our lives**.

- It is rejecting His rule.
- Refusing His authority.
- Choosing our own way over His.

Ever since the Garden of Eden... this has been the essence of every sin. Adam and Eve didn't merely eat forbidden fruit. They rejected God's right to rule over them.

Every sin since then carries the same attitude. “I know what God says... but I will do what I want.”

That is why sin is so serious... It isn't merely **breaking a rule**... It is **REBELLING** against **the King**.

We often minimize sin by giving it softer names.

- I made a mistake.

- I slipped up.
- I wasn't thinking.

But John doesn't **SOFTEN** it. He calls it what it is... **Lawlessness. Which is...**

Rebellion against the holy rule of God.

That helps us understand **why sin** and the Christian life **CANNOT peacefully coexist**.

- If God is now our Father...how can we continually **REJECT** His authority?
- If Jesus is our Lord... how can we continually **RESIST** His **RULE**?

John has already made it **CLEAR** that God's children **STILL** sin. But they can no longer **BE CONTENT LIVING** in **REBELLION** against their Father.

Application

This verse challenges us to examine more than our **BEHAVIOR**. It challenges our **HEARTS**.

Every temptation eventually asks the same question:

- **Who will rule my life?**
- Will I **SUBMIT** to God's authority... or will I **INSIST** on my own?
 - Every **act of obedience** says, "**Your will be done.**"
 - Every **act of sin** says, "**My will be done.**"

That is why sin is never small. It is always personal. It is **REBELLION** against our **heavenly Father**.

b) Jesus Came to Remove Our Sin (v. 5)

John doesn't leave us staring at our **REBELLION**. He immediately points us to our **SAVIOR**.

John tells us in verse 5.

"You know that He appeared in order to take away sins, and in Him there is no sin."

John reminds us **WHY** Jesus came.

- He didn't merely come to give us a better example.
- He didn't simply come to teach us a better way to live.
- He came to deal with our greatest problem... **Our sin**.

John tells us that Jesus came **"To take away sins."**

This points us back to the **Old Testament sacrifices**.

On the **Day of Atonement**, the **scapegoat** symbolically **CARRIED AWAY** the **SINS** of Israel.

John says Jesus is the **FULFILLMENT** of that picture. He **CARRIES AWAY** our sin.

At the cross, Jesus bore the guilt of our sin nature.

- He **satisfied** the Father's righteous judgment.

- He **removed** our condemnation.

But John's point here goes even further. Jesus didn't simply **come** to **forgive sin**. He came to **BREAK sin's grip** on our lives.

The One who **SAVES US** from the **penalty of sin**... is also **TRANSFORMING US** from the **power of sin**.

Jesus didn't come simply to pardon sinners... He came to transform them.

Why?

Because **"In Him there is no sin."**

John says that because Jesus was **WITHOUT** sin, He alone was able to **TAKE AWAY** our sin.

- Peter writes, "He committed no sin" (1 Peter 2:22).
- Paul says, "He knew no sin" (2 Cor. 5:21).
- The writer of Hebrews says, "He was tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15)

Our **perfect Savior** became the **SACRIFICE IMPERFECT SINNERS** desperately needed.

Because there was no sin in Him, He alone could take away the sin in us.

Application

The **CROSS** reminds us that sin is never insignificant. If our sin required the death of the Son of God... it cannot be something we casually tolerate.

- But it also reminds us that **NO SIN** is **beyond** Christ's power to forgive.

Whatever your past... whatever your failures... Jesus came to take away sin.

That is our **HOPE**.

c) Abiding Breaks Sin's Pattern (v. 6)

Now John brings everything together.

"No one who abides in Him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen Him or known Him."

This is one of the most **misunderstood verses** in all of 1 John.

At first glance, it sounds like John is saying **Christians never sin**. But that **CANNOT BE** what he means.

In **1 John 1:8**, John wrote, "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves."

And in **1 John 2:1**, "If anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father."

John isn't **CONTRADICTING** himself.

The verb **"keeps on sinning"** describes an **ongoing, continual pattern** of life.

John is talking about someone who **lives in SIN comfortably, continually, and unrepentantly**.

- The difference isn't that believers never sin.

- The difference is that believers can no longer make peace with sin.

Why?

Because they abide in Christ. To abide means to remain... to continue... to live in close fellowship with Jesus.

As we abide in Him... His life changes ours... His Spirit convicts us... His Word corrects us... and His grace transforms us.

God's children **may stumble into** sin... but they cannot **comfortably settle** in sin.

- That doesn't make them perfect.
- It demonstrates that something has fundamentally changed inside them.

John calls that change the new birth.

2. Righteousness Reveals the New Birth

John now moves from our relationship with sin to the evidence of new life.

The question is no longer, “**Do you claim to belong to God?**”

The question is, “**Does your life reveal that you have been born of God?**”

John begins answering that question with one unmistakable mark of the new birth.

a) Right Living Reflects our Righteous Savior (v. 7)

John begins **verse 7** with a warning.

“**Little children, let no one deceive you.**”

Apparently, false teachers were claiming that a person's conduct had little to do with their relationship with God.

John says, **Don't believe it.**

Notice what he **doesn't** say: “The one who practices righteousness becomes righteous.”

He says, “The one who practices righteousness is righteous.”

Righteous living is **NOT** the **ROOT** of our salvation... It is the **FRUIT** of our salvation.

- Our righteous actions do not make us right with God.
- They reveal that God has already made us right through Christ.

John points us to Jesus “...**just as He is righteous.**”

- The standard is not other Christians.
- The standard is Christ Himself.

As we abide in Him, His righteousness increasingly shapes the way we think... the way we speak... and the way we live.

Application

One of the clearest evidences of the new birth is a **growing desire TO DO** what **pleases God**.

- Not perfectly... but consistently.
- Not because we're trying to earn God's favor... but because we already belong to Him.

Right living doesn't EARN the new birth—it REVEALS it.

b) Persistent Sin Reveals the Devil's Family (v. 8)

John now presents the **opposite picture** in **verse 8**: **“The one who practices sin is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning.”**

Those are strong words. John is not saying every person who sins belongs to the devil. He has already acknowledged that believers still sin. He's describing someone whose life is characterized by ongoing, unrepentant rebellion.

Why?

Because that pattern reflects the devil's character. The devil has opposed God's rule from the very beginning.

- He rebelled against God.
- He deceived Eve.
- He continues to oppose God's purposes.

Those who continually practice sin demonstrate whose influence they are following.

Notice the contrast.

- God's children increasingly resemble their Father.
- Those who persist in rebellion resemble another father.

John is drawing a line between two families. There is no middle ground.

But don't miss the good news.

John immediately reminds us, **“The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil.”**

- Jesus didn't simply come to forgive sinners.
- He came to defeat the kingdom of darkness.
 - At the cross,
 - He broke sin's power.
 - He defeated Satan's authority.
 - He secured our victory.

Because Christ has conquered, sin no longer has to rule those who belong to Him.

Application

Ask yourself:

- Who is shaping my life?
- Whose character is becoming visible in me?

Because everyone reflects someone.

Every life reflects the influence of the one it follows.

c) God's Life Produces a Changed Life

John now explains **why** believers cannot continue comfortably in sin. In **verse 9**, he writes: “**No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, because God’s seed remains in him...**”

Again, John is **NOT** teaching **SINLESS PERFECTION**. He is describing a changed pattern of life.

Why?

Because something supernatural has happened.

John says, “**God’s seed remains in him.**”

The reason our lives change is that **God's life** now lives in us. And when God's life enters a person, it changes that person.

- New desires.
- New affections.
- New convictions.
- New direction.

The new birth doesn't make us perfect overnight. But it does make us different.

- The old life no longer fits.
- The Spirit convicts.
- The heart responds.
- Repentance becomes a way of life.

Application

- Don't ask, “Have I ever sinned?”
- Ask, “Is God continuing to change me?”
 - Is there evidence of new desires?
 - Growing obedience?
 - A deeper love for Christ?

Those are the marks of God's life at work.

The new birth always produces a new way of life.

John has shown us two very different patterns of life.

- One reflects Christ.
- The other reflects the devil.

Now he brings everything together with one unmistakable conclusion:

Your family is revealed by your resemblance.

3. Resemblance Reveals the Relationship

After **CONTRASTING** the life **characterized by sin** with the life **transformed by the new birth**, John now brings everything together in one unmistakable conclusion.

Look again at verse 10:

“This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not God's child, nor is anyone who does not love his brother and sister.”

John leaves no room for confusion. There are only two spiritual families.

- The children of God.
- And the children of the devil.

The difference is **NOT** determined by **what we claim**. It is revealed by the **direction of our lives**.

John is not asking, “What do you say you believe?”

He is asking, “What does your life reveal?”

a) God's Children Practice Righteousness

Notice the first mark in **verse 10**:

“Anyone who does not do what is right is not God's child...”

John is not teaching salvation by good works. If he were, he would contradict everything he has already written.

He has already told us that salvation is **rooted** in the **Father's love... secured by Jesus' work... and received** through the **new birth**.

Now he simply says that the new birth becomes visible. Children naturally resemble their parents. Spiritually, the same principle is true. God's children increasingly resemble their heavenly Father.

- Not perfectly... But genuinely.
- Not sinlessly... But progressively.

As God changes our hearts, He changes our desires. As He changes our desires, He changes the way we live.

Righteous living is not the cause of the new birth. It is the evidence of the new birth.

Application

This is why we must be careful not to reduce Christianity to **A PROFESSION OF FAITH WITHOUT a TRANSFORMED LIFE.**

Saving faith is more than something we profess. It is something that progressively changes us.
If God is truly our Father, His character will increasingly become visible in our lives.

God's children don't practice righteousness to become part of His family. They practice righteousness because they already belong to His family.

b) God's Children Display the Father's Love

John ends **verse 10** by introducing a second family resemblance.

“...nor is anyone who does not love his brother and sister.”

At first, that statement almost seems out of place. John has spent the entire passage talking about **righteousness** and **sin**. Then suddenly, he speaks about love.

Why?

Because righteousness is never merely vertical. It always becomes horizontal.

Those who love the Father increasingly love the Father's children. You cannot claim to belong to God's family while continually **refusing to love** those who **BELONG** to His family.

Love is **NOT** an **optional** characteristic of the Christian life. It is part of the family resemblance.

John doesn't develop that thought here because he is about to spend the rest of the chapter doing exactly that. Beginning in verse 11, he will show us what genuine Christian love looks like.

But before he moves there, he leaves us with this unmistakable truth: God's children are recognized not only by their growing righteousness... but also by their growing love.

Application

The question is not simply “Am I becoming more moral?” The question is also, “Am I becoming more loving?”

- Is my life marked by patience?
 - Forgiveness?
 - Compassion?
 - A willingness to serve?
 - A growing love for God's people?

Because the Father's love **NEVER STOPS** with Him. It **ALWAYS FLOWS** through His children.

The children of God reflect the character of their Father and the love of their Savior.

John has taken us on a remarkable journey.

- He has shown us what sin really is.
- He has reminded us why Christ came.

- He has explained what the new birth produces.
- And now he leaves us with one unmistakable truth:

Family resemblance reveals family relationship.

You don't become God's child by living righteously or loving others.

Rather, **righteous living** and **genuine love REVEAL** that you **have been BORN** into God's family.

That is the real thing!

CONCLUSION

So how should we respond to God's Word today?

- Don't simply admire the truth.
- Let the truth examine your heart.

Ask yourself these four questions:

- **Can others increasingly see the character of my heavenly Father in the way I live?**
- **Is there any sin I've begun to tolerate instead of repent of?**
- **Am I abiding in Christ, or trying to live the Christian life in my own strength?**
- **Who can I intentionally love this week as a member of God's family?**

If your answer to those questions **reveals areas** where you **need to GROW**, don't leave **DISCOURAGED**. Leave encouraged. The same Father who **gave you new life** is **CONTINUING** to **TRANSFORM** your life.

- Don't leave today **TRYING HARDER** to **look like** one of God's children. Leave today **WALKING MORE CLOSELY** with your Father.

As you **ABIDE** in Christ...

- His life will continue to transform yours.
- His character will become increasingly visible in you.

And over time... **the family resemblance will become unmistakable.**