

The Birthmarks of the Children of God

1 John 5:1-5

Introduction: 1) It is very often the case that children follow in their parent's footsteps and follow their example. We often hear the statements, "Like father, like son," or "She is just like her mother." In addition, it is also the case that children usually bear a striking resemblance to either their mom or dad or even both. Someone may say, "He is the spitting image of his dad. He has his dad's eyes or his nose or chin." Our daughters-in-law are fond of pointing out in their children what they call "the Akin mouth!" I am not quite sure if they mean their mouth is similar to their dad and mine or that they talk a lot like their dad and granddaddy! Either way they are acknowledging family resemblance or birthmarks that give evidence to whom they belong.

2) In the letter of 1 John, the last living apostle has repeatedly drawn attention to 3 overarching birthmarks of the children of God. They are 1) right belief (the doctrinal mark), 2) right love (the moral mark) and 3) right behavior (the ethical or social mark). Now in 1 John 5:1-5 he is going to draw out necessary implications of these 3 birthmarks and highlight 6 specific identifying evidences that a person is a child of God. John wants true believers to be assured that they are children of God, and he is fully aware of the fact that there are spiritual deceivers in their midst who could raise questions and cast doubts (2:26). John wants them to have a

rock-solid assurance that they have been born again, belong to Jesus and enjoy right now the gift of eternal life (5:13).

3) John Piper says the evidences of the new birth could probably be boiled down to two: Faith and love. I think he is right and here we see how John develops these ideas to assure us we are in the family, the family of God.

I. We believe that Jesus is the Christ 5:1

1) Once again John raises the doctrinal or Christological issue. We are reminded that it will always come back to Jesus, who He is and what you believe about Him. John will begin and end this section with a Christological affirmation (5:1, 5). I find it fascinating that he bookends this text with the two-part confession of the apostle Peter in Matthew 16:16, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” In 5:1 we must believe Jesus is the Christ. In 5:5 we must confess Him as the Son of God.

2) John begins with an all inclusive word: “Everyone.” No one is excluded. All must embrace and articulate the statement that follows. The word “believes” speaks of continuous action. Everyone who is believing is the idea. And what must we believe? “That Jesus is the Christ.” We must believe, trust in the truth, that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah, the Christ, the hoped for and promised deliverer. Such a confession is a birthmark that we have been born of God and that we are a child of God.

3) The London pastor and preacher Charles Spurgeon fleshes out the theological implications of this confession of faith as only he could. He says,

“Let us advance. The faith intended in the text *evidently rests upon a person*—upon Jesus. “Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God.” It is not belief about a doctrine, nor an opinion, nor a formula, but belief concerning a person. Translate the words,

“Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ,” and they stand thus:

“Whosoever believeth that the Savior is the Anointed is born of God...”

What is meant by “Jesus is the Christ,” or, Jesus is the Anointed? First, that he is the Prophet; secondly, that he is the Priest; thirdly, that he is the King of the church, for in all these three senses he is the Anointed. Now, I may ask myself this question: Do I this day believe that Jesus is the great Prophet anointed of God to reveal to me the way of salvation? Do I accept him as my teacher, and admit that he has the words of eternal life? If I so believe, I shall obey his gospel and possess eternal life. Do I accept him to be henceforth the revealer of God to my soul, the messenger of the covenant, the anointed Prophet of the Most High? But he is also a priest. Now, a priest is ordained from among men to offer sacrifices; do I firmly believe that Jesus was ordained to offer his one

sacrifice for the sins of mankind, by the offering of which sacrifice once for all he has finished atonement and made complete expiation? Do I accept his atonement as an atonement for me, and receive his death as an expiation upon which I rest my hope for forgiveness of all my transgressions? Do I in fact believe Jesus to be the one sole, only propitiating Priest, and accept him to act as priest for me? If so, then I have in part believed that Jesus is the Anointed. But he is also King, and if I desire to know whether I possess the right faith, I further must ask myself, "Is Jesus, who is now exalted in heaven, who once bled on the cross, is he King to me? Is his law my law? Do I desire entirely to submit myself to his government? Do I hate what he hates, and love what he loves? Do I live to praise him? Do I, as a loyal subject, desire to see his kingdom come and his will done on earth as it is in heaven?" My dear friend, if thou canst heartily and earnestly say, "I accept Jesus Christ of Nazareth to be Prophet, Priest, and King to me, because God has anointed him to exercise those three offices; and in each of these three characters I unfeignedly trust him" then, dear friend, you have the faith of God's elect, for it is written, "He that believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God."

("Faith and Regeneration," *MTP*, March 5, 1871, pgs. 137-138).

4) Adrian Rogers well said, “The assurance of my salvation comes not from the fact that I did trust Christ but that I am trusting Christ for my salvation.” (*Adrianisms*, Vol. 2, 186).

II. We have been born of God 5:1, 4

1) John will allude to the new birth, being “born of God” three times in these verses. It is a theme he began in 2:29 and will complete in 5:18. There is little doubt he got the idea from Jesus in John 3 where Jesus told the religious leader Nicodemus, “unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3).

2) In these verses John makes 3 observations about the new birth and evidences related to this birthmark. First, those who have “been born of God” (perfect tense) give witness to their new birth by confessing that Jesus is the Christ (5:1). Second, those who have “been born of God” give witness to their new birth by loving Father God and His children (5:1). Third, those who have “been born of God” give witness to their new birth by continually overcoming the world (5:4).

3) “Born of God” is a biblical birthmark or description of a Christian. It also is designated in Scripture as “born again,” “born from above” and “regeneration.” It is not an optional or secondary experience for a child of God. It is essential and initiatory. Jesus said in John 3:7, “You must be

born again.” To be a Christian is to be born again or “born of God.” If you have not been born again then you are not a Christian. However, if you will simply trust Jesus as your Christ, believing Him to be the very Son of God who lived the life you should have lived but didn’t, died the death you should have died but now do not have to, and was raised from the dead to give you a salvation you do not deserve, you will indeed experience the supernatural work of God of the new birth. Being born of God and believing in Jesus are intertwined in the Bible and cannot be separated. “Born of God” looks to the work of God in transforming our hearts.” “Believing in Jesus” looks to the response of man as he hears and believes the gospel. In this new birth God does not just give you a new name, He gives you a new nature. He gives you the very nature of God himself as you enter into His family.

4) Jesus did not come to die on a bloody cross to make us kinder and nicer persons. He came to dramatically, personally, radically and eternally transform us and make us new people. It is by the new birth that He accomplishes this glorious work. Therefore, you must be born again. Have you experienced the new birth?

III. We love the Father and his family 5:1-2

1) Doctrinal excellence, a bold faith, evangelistic fervor and a generous hand are all good things. However, they are not what matters most to God. The

one thing that he desires more than anything else is that we love Him.

Without love for God, even the good things we do have no value in His eyes.

2) In these 2 verses we see that our love for God is multi-dimension, multi-faceted. It flows to the Father but then its streams branch out in several directions. The word love appears more than 30 times in 1 John 4:7-5:3. It occurs 5 times here in verses 1-3.

3) The new birth of regeneration brings us into a relationship with God as Father. This Father first loved us and now we love Him (4:19) for who He is and what He has done for us in Christ (4:10). However we not only love the Father, we also love the family the Father is building. We will love our brothers and sisters, “whoever has been born of him” (v.1).

4) But John then makes an interesting statement in verse 2 that at first seems out of order. He says we can “know (continually) that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments.” But is it out of order? I don’t think so. I think John’s point actually is grounded in Jesus’ teaching on the two great commandments (Matt. 22:36-40). My love for others is the natural complement and companion to my “first love” for God. When I love God, I will keep His commandments. And, keeping His commandments involves loving others, in particular, his daughters and sons. Furthermore, verse 3 informs us that obeying the command to love one

another will not be burdensome, a heavy weight to carry around. It will be a joy and a delight because the new birth makes it our nature, the natural thing to do. And our love for the Father inspires and motivates us to love those He loves and to love them as He loves us.

5) John's argument has tremendous practical application. First, it will protect us from sentimental and emotional understandings of love that leave God's character and commandments out of the picture. Second, because my love for God guides my love for others, I will seek their ultimate good, not that which is temporal and passing. I will not seek to make others comfortable while neglecting their greatest need which is eternal salvation in Christ. I may clothe, educate and feed them, which are all good things to do. But, I will strive above all other things to help them come to know, love and trust in Jesus as the Son of God (5:5) and their personal Christ (5:1). After all, as our Lord said in Mark 8:36, "For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?"

IV. We obey His commandments 5:2-3

1) John returns to theme of obedience to the commandments of God (see 2:4, 7, 8; 3:22-24). Though he knew that loving God and obeying God were distinguishable, he also knew that they were inseparable (John 14:15).

2) Here he adds a new perspective on obedience that I believe is liberating. It is found at the end of verse 3 where he says that God's commandments "are not burdensome." How does that work itself out? Here is what I think John is saying. In the new birth I receive a new nature. With this new nature comes new affections, passions, treasures and values. Because I now love God instead of hating Him, I treasure and value Him above everyone and everything else. And, because I treasure and value Him above everyone and everything else, I delight in obeying Him. Now I find His commandments not a burden, but a blessing. They are not a drudgery, they are a delight. John Piper is right, "What you desire to do with your whole heart is not burdensome to do" ("Regeneration, Faith, Love: In That Order", 3-2-08). My heart desires to love and obey my Lord.

3) In the Psalms we repeatedly find the joyful testimonies of regenerate hearts as they sing of their joy in doing the will of the Lord and obeying His commandments.

- Psalm 1:1-2 - "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.

- Psalm 35:27- “Let those who delight in my righteousness shout for joy and be glad and say evermore, “Great is the LORD, who delights in the welfare of his servant!”
- Psalm 37:4- “Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.”
- Psalm 40:8- “I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart.”
- Psalm 112:1- “Praise the LORD! Blessed is the man who fears the LORD, who greatly delights in his commandments!”
- Psalm 119:14- “In the way of your testimonies I delight as much as in all riches.”
- Psalm 119:16- “I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word.”
- Psalm 119:24- “Your testimonies are my delight; they are my counselors.
- Psalm 119:35- “Lead me in the path of your commandments; for I delight in it.”
- Psalm 119:47- “For I find my delight in your commandments, which I love.

- Psalm 119:70- “Their heart is unfeeling like fat, but I delight in your law.”
- Psalm 119:77- “Let your mercy come to me, that I may live; for your law is my delight.”
- Psalm 119:143- “Trouble and anguish have found me out, but your commandments are my delight.”
- Psalm 119:174- “I long for your salvation, O LORD, and your law is my delight.”

4) Jerry Bridges says it quite well, “God’s love provides us with the motivation for obedience, while God’s laws provide the direction for the biblical expressions of love” (*The Discipline of Grace*). Loving God rightly then, is not just external behavior and outward obedience. It is a longing to do His will from the heart out of gospel gratitude for who He is and what He has done for us in Jesus. It is not an “I have to” obedience. It is an “I want to” obedience. I love to obey this King!

V. We have overcome the world 5:4

1) The theme of verse 4 is made clear by the repetition of the word “overcome” (also v.5). Interestingly both the word “overcome” and “victory” come from the same Greek word *nike*, the Greek goddess of

victory, speed and strength, *Nike*'s Roman name was "Victoria," and not surprisingly, she has wings in most paintings and statues.

2) The one, "everyone," who has been born of God (perfect tense) overcomes, is continually victorious, over the world. This is a 5th authenticating mark of the children of God. John provided a description of "the world" (3 times in vs. 4-5) in 1 John 2:16. It is characterized by the trio of "the desires of the flesh, and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions." John then points to an additional spiritual weapon that grants us victory in our spiritual battles: "our faith."

3) I love the beautiful balance we see here as John weds the new birth (God's sovereign work) with our faith (human responsibility). Let's try and put all this together: By means of the new birth (5:1,4) which is wedded to our faith in Jesus as the Christ (5:1) and the Son of God (5:5), the power of the world's desires and aspirations is broken and we gain victory over them. The world is no longer my passion, God is! Sinful desires and attractions are no longer beautiful, God and His will is.

4) Overcomers via the new birth and faith in Christ are no longer consumed by what they don't have (desire of the flesh and eyes) or what they do have (pride in possessions). The spell has been broken. The shackles have come loose. The blinders have been removed. We no longer pine after and love

stuff. Rather, with new holy affections, we pine after and love God. The new birth makes all of this possible and faith gives us the eyes to see it! John Piper says it so well, “Faith sees that Jesus is better. That is why faith conquers the world. The world held us in bondage by the power of its desires. But now our eyes have been opened by the new birth to see the superior desirability of Jesus. Jesus is better than the desires of the flesh, and better than the desires of the eyes, and better than the riches that strangle us with greed and pride (Mark 4:19).” (Regeneration, Faith, Love: In that Order” 3-2-08).

5) Jesus is indeed better and faith is the victory that overcomes the world. Faith was at the beginning, it is with us today, and it will be with us to the end. It is a distinguishing birthmark that says I am a child of God.

VI. We believe Jesus is the Son of God 5:5

1) Adrian Rogers said, “Faith in faith is just positive thinking, but faith in Jesus is salvation.” (*Adrianisms*, Vol. 2, 173). John brings us full circle and back to Jesus. In verse 1 those who confess Him as the Christ give evidence that they have “been born of God.” Now in verse 5 those who believe that Jesus is the Son of God understand that this faith commitment is the means whereby they gain victory and overcome the world.

2) “Son of God” is an important title for Jesus in the Bible. It informs us that He is more than a man. He is also God. He is the God-man. His name “Jesus” identifies Him as a man. “Son of God” identifies Him as God. He has both the nature of humanity as Jesus and the nature of God as the Son of God. He came from God and He is God. He is the eternal Son who always has and always will exist as the 2nd person of the Triune God.

3) The birthmark of a child of God is that he is believing that Jesus is the Son of God and that only Jesus is the Son of God. This believing, this faith, is both particular and it is persevering. Jesus and only Jesus is the object of this faith confession. And, this confession is continuous and ongoing.

“Believe” is a present tense verb noting continuous action. This is not a one time belief. It is a lifetime belief! And, it is a personal and individual faith. No one else can believe for me. No one else can believe for you. You must believe the good news of the gospel for yourself. You must trust Jesus Christ the Son of God for yourself.

4) John 3:36 says, “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him”. I would urge you, plead with you, even beg you, choose Jesus. Choose life. It will not just be your best life now. It will be your best life ever and forever!

Conclusion: 1) The Lübeck Cathedral is a Lutheran church building that was begun in 1173 and completed around 1230. A famous inscription resides on one of the walls of the Cathedral which reads:

“Ye call Me Master and obey Me not,
Ye call Me Light and see Me not,
Ye call Me Way and walk not,
Ye call Me Life and desire Me not,
Ye call Me Wise and follow Me not,
Ye call Me Fair and love Me not,
Ye call Me Rich and ask Me not,
Ye call Me Eternal and seek Me not,
Ye call Me Gracious and trust Me not,
Ye call Me Noble and serve Me not,
Ye call Me Mighty and honor Me not,
Ye call Me Just and fear Me not,
If I condemn you, blame me not.”

Anonymous

2) I have good news. Jesus is indeed all these things and more. And, He does not want to condemn you. The fact is He already experienced your condemnation for you when He died as an atoning sacrifice for your sins (1 John 2:2; 4:10). No, He

has something so much better. He wants you to believe that He is the Christ, the Son of God, and experience spiritual new birth. He wants to change your heart that you might delight in loving the Father and the Family of God. He wants to inflame you with passion for His glory that you desire to keep His commandments. He wants to fill you with faith that you overcome the obstacles and temptations the world throws at you. This is what the Son of God wants for you. He wants you to bear in your life and in your soul the birthmarks that you are a child of God.