

1 John 3:4-10

INTRODUCTION

The more I try to get into the mindset of John and the more I talk to other ministers about John's letters then the more I realise that although John's statements are usually very simple his flow of thought is very complex. John covers the same subjects again and again throughout the book rather than dealing with the subject and then moving on to the next one like Paul does. John continually deals with a number of subjects throughout the book.

Often coming back again and again to what he has said before and adding to it or approaching the subject from a different angle. However although his thought pattern is not particularly very easy to follow, his main message and purpose for writing is simple enough. He is writing to assure the believers in the church that they are Christians and he gives them a number of tests that will prove that they belong to God. At the same time these tests will clearly show that the false teachers who claimed to be real Christians will be proven to be false.

In this section John says that you can tell who is false and who is true by their attitude to sin and to Jesus Christ. That is also true of ourselves we can tell if we belong to God by our attitude to sin and to the Lord Jesus Christ.

1. OUR ATTITUDE TO SIN

First of all we need a definition of what John means by sin and he gives that to us in verse 4. Sin is lawlessness. Now what John means here is that if we break one of God's laws we are obviously sinning. If we just take the summary of God's law in the Ten Commandments then; when we have other gods in our hearts or when we do not honour our parents or when we covet other people's possessions then we are guilty of breaking God's law and of sinning.

We all know what lawlessness is don't we? If we drive our car at 40 MPH in a 30 MPH zone then we are breaking the law of the land and we are lawless in that sense. However John is talking about much more than committing sin that makes us lawless he is talking about our attitude to the law. If I drive my car at 40 MPH in a 30 MPH speed limit and I am stopped and told about it. If I say well I don't care about the speed limit I don't care what the law says I don't listen or heed what the law says I will drive my car at whatever speed I like then that is lawlessness.

If the next week I drive my car down the same street at 30 MPH and am stopped by the same person and told how pleased they are that my attitude has changed. But if I respond by saying I don't care about the law I drive my car at whatever speed I want to although I might be keeping the law of the land I am lawless because of my attitude to the law. That is John's point. Sin for John is not just the actual act but also our attitude to God's law. So you can still live a reasonably good and moral life and yet be lawless because our attitude to God's law is that we don't care about it for we live our lives our way by our own standards.

So immediately we have an application that will prove whether one is a true Christian or not. A true Christian is someone who has a firm respect and awe and fear of God's law.

As such we will live our lives in accordance with God's law. However if someone's attitude to God's law is one of contempt or one of indifference then that person will be lawless not just in acts but in attitude. I want you to notice what John says about the person who does what is sinful (v 8). Such a person is of the devil. Why does John draw such a conclusion? The answer is very simple we have a family likeness. My hairdresser told me that she saw Hannah (my daughter) last week.

She does not know Hannah and Hannah at the time she saw her was with Sarah (my other daughter) and my wife Sandra and I was in seeing Sarah's teacher. I asked Bridget (my hairdresser) how she knew Hannah belonged to me? O she said "I see the family likeness." She knows Jason (my son) and me and as a result she was able to identify Hannah and Sarah as belonging to our family. That is what John is saying. When someone sins they do what the rest of the family does a family that is headed up by the devil himself. You see the bible puts everyone into one of two families (v 10) you are either in the family of God or you are in the family of the devil. You are either one of God's children or one of the devil's children.

When we are born into this world we are in the devil's family it is only when we are born of God (v 9) that we become a member of God's family.

If you don't know which family you are in then look at your attitude to sin and to God's law and if you do so with an honest heart then that will clearly show whether you are a child of God or a child of the devil.

2 OUR ATTITUDE TO JESUS CHRIST

The second test as to whether one is a Christian or not is to look at our attitude to Jesus Christ. Jesus is the very opposite to sin he knew no sin and if we take verses 5 & 8 together we can say that Christ is anti sin. The reason why Jesus came into the world was to take away our sins. Our sins bound us to the devil we were in his camp until Jesus came and took away our sin. But this is a personal thing here isn't it. John does talk about Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world in his gospel but here he is talking about our sin personally.

This is not a general term to describe Jesus work but a very specific term to indicate what he has done for us who are Christians. He of course could do it because in him is no sin (v 5). He being perfect could die in the place of those who are imperfect because of sin. He could pay the penalty and take the guilt that was ours upon himself and as a consequence he died to take away to remove our sins from us and he placed them upon himself.

This means that God's wrath was upon Jesus because of our sins and is no longer upon us.

This conversion from being in the family of the devil to being in the family of God means that we are born again or born of God (v 9). God has come upon our life and

has awakened us from our spiritual deadness, he has granted us forgiveness of sins because of Christ and as a result God's nature is living in us (v 9). So if we have our sins forgiven and been born of God then our attitude to Christ will be one of love and thankfulness to him. But it will be more than this.

Because Jesus Christ is anti sin we too will be anti sin and John puts this both positively and negatively.

Positively we will obey Christ; we will do what is right (v 7 & 10). This means that we will live according to what God declares to be right and not what the world declares to be right. So when a member of our family comes to us and tells us that they are moving in with their boy friend or girl friend we will tell them that to do so is wrong. When they respond by telling us that everyone does it nowadays we will not be influenced by such an argument because we will do what is right according to God not according to the world.

So here is the test, do we generally live in a way that is right before God, are we known as people who are honest and people who are not influenced by the mood of the times and are we people who are committed to living by God's standards rather than the worlds. That is what it means to do right.

But John also shows us that being anti sin like Jesus means that we don't sin willingly or habitually (vs. 6 & 9). Now let me be clear by telling you what John does not mean here. It is clear that John does not mean that the person who lives in Christ is perfect and sinless. John has already made it clear in 1:8-2:1 that we do sin and anyone who claims to be without sin is a liar. So John cannot be contradicting himself here.

But what we must remember is that people are in one of two families, either they are in the family that belongs to the devil or they are in the family that belongs to God. The family way for the devil's people is the way of sin for the devil has been sinning from the beginning (v 8). It is his habit since he rebelled against God he has been leading people into the way of sin. He succeeded with Adam and Eve and since their fall we all have been born into sin and sin is our natural habit.

However if we belong to God and have been born of God then we belong to a different family. The way of this family is the way of its head the Lord Jesus. It is the way of anti sin; it's the way of righteousness and rightness. Therefore people who belong to this family will not want to sin, they will be grieved by sin and will immediately confess their sin and be forgiven (1:9).

The continual habit of these people is right living they will be people who do what is right. They will of course sin because their sinful nature is still in existence but their sin will be seen for what it is and repentance will follow. On the other hand the person who goes the devil's way will sin and not think twice about it because that is the way of the family. So a Christian is some one who does what is right that is right according to God's view of rightness and he or she is someone who does not habitually sin and when he does sin he will grieve over it and confess it.

For as Christian sin doesn't fit comfortable into our lives, its not that we cannot sin but its just that sin no longer belongs or is not at home in our lives. This is because

the reason Jesus came into the world was to destroy the work of the devil (v 8). His work is to keep people bound in sin to keep them as slaves to sin but Jesus came to break the power of sin in our lives to free us from the devil's grip and from the devils' ways.

Therefore the true Christian's lifestyle will show that the power of the Evil One has been destroyed and broken within the life of the Christian. So as I conclude here is a very clear test to tell whether we are a child of God or a child of the devil. It is a test that we all must be prepared to put ourselves through. Do we habitually follow the ways of sin and delight in it? If we do then we have no reason to claim we belong to God.

However if we do not habitually sin if we grieve over our sin and if we live right before God if we have a sense of awe and reverence for God's law. Then those are sure signs that we belong to God that Jesus Christ has forgiven us and that we have been set free from the power of the devil in our lives. So let us test ourselves and if we pass the test then let us rejoice in Jesus Christ that we are born of God and live in him and his nature remains in us.

Let us give him all the glory.

Amen