

The Marks of the New Birth

The clearest description of the evidences and marks of the new birth are in the first epistle of John. He describes a number of prominent features that characterize those truly born of God. John, using solemn words and speaking with certainty says, "Little children let no one deceive you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous; the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose that He might destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:7, 8). Once again we are warned not to be deceived about people who claim to have received Christ, but whose lives are marked by ongoing sin. John says they are still of the devil. To say that a person can remain continually in sin and be born again is to deny the very purpose and objective of Christ's work. Christ appeared to destroy the works of the devil and the fundamental work of the devil is sin, for he sinned from the beginning. If a believer can go on in sin then Christ's death and the new birth did not accomplish His purpose on their behalf, which is impossible.

John says, don't be deceived about this, words alone prove nothing, profession without proof proves nothing. A changed life and that alone proves whether a person is of God.

John describes six prominent features and characteristics of the new birth. First, the believer practices righteousness. John says, "If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone also who practices righteousness is born of Him" (1 John 2:29). Righteousness means to do the right. For the Christian doing the right is doing God's will, particularly as outlined in Scripture. It is doing as Jesus says, "the will of My Father in heaven" (Matthew 7:21). Doing the right is as much an attitude as an activity. It isn't simply a matter of externals

such as church attendance, Bible study or even public worship. The Pharisees excelled at these. It's a matter of the heart. A person who is born again submits to and does the will of God from the heart.

These qualities are lacking in many who go through the motions in the church today. Next, they do not practice sin (1 John 3:9). They also love God and fellow believers (1 John 4:7). They continue to believe in Christ (1 John 5:4), and the evil one, Satan, does not touch them (1 John 5:18). It must be restated that these are general characteristics. There are periods when sin gains the upper hand. However, they ebb and flow as they grow and develop to become the general direction and characteristic of the life. If they permanently cease, then the person was never saved to begin with. For example, John, referring to sin, says, "No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him and he cannot sin, because he is born of God" (1 John 3:9).

Clearly John viewed sin as losing out in the end to the more dominant force of the new birth and righteousness. He is not saying that the seed of God within the Christian cannot go on sinning but the Christian can. This is to miss the point. He is speaking of the children of God and the children of the devil being obvious (verse 10). He is talking of things noticeable. His point is to give a test by which to judge the reality of the new birth in a concrete and obvious way, and the most obvious feature of the new birth is that a person cannot continue in sin. John also states that a person cannot continue on in sin. John also states that a person who is born again continues to believe that Jesus is the Christ. He says, "Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God" (1 John 5:1). The present tense indicates that the belief is ongoing and continuous. The new birth cannot be reversed, so faith, as a fruit and mark of the new birth, cannot cease. A person who once believed and then renounced it had a faulty non-saving faith to begin with.

Don't know who wrote the above, but I say, Amen!

Chuck Petersen