

How do you know if you've been born of God?

1 John 5:1-5

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This past week, I got to hold a new born child. Baby Ava was just under 5 days old. I marveled again at the miracle of life. Her little fingers were all there. She has lots of hair. Her little eyes opened when someone talked or the dog barked. And her little lungs give great power to her cry. I talked with her parents and asked lots of questions about how Ava came into the world.

But there was one question I didn't ask. I did not say "are you sure this is your baby? Are you sure that she was born of you?" I could see some hints of her dad and mom's features in her face. I could tell this was the same baby in the pictures at the hospital. Ava was born of this Dad and Mom – there was no doubt.

As she grows, she will continue to resemble her parents. She will carry features of her Dad and Mom's side of the family. You can sometimes tell which child goes with what parents just by looking.

But as God's children, it's a little different. God is Spirit. We are physical human beings though we are made in His image. So you can't tell if someone is a Christian just by looking at them. How do you tell if someone has been born of God? Thankfully, God provides markers or indicators that show up in the lives of His children to show that we are born of Him.

This can be very important for us when we're struggling in our faith. Or we're not sure about our faith because we don't experience what that other child of God experiences at their church or in their walk. But these indicators can help assure us that we are God's children and that He has adopted us. Though ultimately only God knows our soul status, we gain much greater insight into our own walk with God and relationship to Him if we will pay attention to these indicators.

We discover them as the Apostle John nears the end of his first letter in the New Testament. We have seen him define three tests for authentic Christians. The Belief Test - True Christians believe and confess that Jesus is God the Son come in the flesh. The Obedience Test - True Christians obey God's commands. The Love Test - True Christians love one another. Now he will bring these three tests together in one paragraph.

But he does not just restate the tests. He ties them to being born of God. As we walk through today's passage, if you are already God's child, I pray you will gain assurance of that today. Sometimes we might wonder if God is at work at all. Or maybe you will discover that you're not sure if you're God's child based on these indicators. You will consider

what to do about that. Or maybe the Holy Spirit will reveal that you are born of God but the indicators are weak and you'll need to look at that. But first we will see these indicators of being born of God. While we go through them, I invite you to ask yourself – is this showing up in my life? Then we'll have some time to respond to the Lord and then meet Him at His table.

1 John 5:1-5

1 Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him. 2 By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. 3 For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome. 4 For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. 5 Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

What does it mean to be “born of God?” Someone is born of God if they have been spiritually reborn. Jesus used this language in his conversation with Nicodemus in John's Gospel. John 3:3 – Truly, truly I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. . . . Do not marvel that I said to you, “you must be born again. The wind blows where it wishes and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

John picks up on Jesus' birth in this letter. He portrays spiritual rebirth as something initiated by God and brought into effect through the Holy Spirit received by faith. **To be born of God – God initiated and gave spiritual life to us that we receive by faith.** Before God came along and did a work in our heart, we were spiritually dead. But then God came and visited us bringing us to life. John refers to this result of God's work by using the past tense. He “has been” born of God. Those born of God will be like God just like Ava was born of her parents and is like her parents.

So what indicates a person has been “born of God?” What shows that you or another person has been born of God? We find **Indicator #1** in verse 1. “Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God.” So **Belief that Jesus is the Christ** indicates one born of God. If you believe that the man Jesus was the promised one from the Old Testament; God in flesh; God the Son – that indicates that you have been born of God. Many people do not believe that about Jesus. They have doubts about him. They may not believe he existed. Or maybe they believe he was an inspiring person but nothing more. Maybe they don't believe He is God the Son. If someone says they don't believe that Jesus is the Christ, they're likely not born of God or are going through a time of struggle in their faith. Someone born of God

believes Jesus is the Christ. Remember in John “believing” does not only mean affirming with your mind. It includes following with your life. So if you believe Jesus is the Christ and desire to follow Him that indicates new life in Christ.

Indicator #2 also comes from verse 1. **They love the Father.** How do we know we’re born of God? If you have been born of God, you will love God. Just as a child will naturally love its father and mother, a child of God loves their Father. So one way we can examine ourselves and invite others to examine themselves is to ask “do I love God?” “Do you love God?” We’ll talk in a moment about how we go about loving God.

Indicator #3 is also found in verse 1. **They love God’s children – other Christians.** A person born of God loves other people born of God. In a family there is hopefully a love between members of the family. If you find some long lost member of your family, you might immediately sense that connection and love for them because you’re related. In a similar way, a child of God loves other children of God.

But how do we show this love to God and to his children? We can say we love God and His children. But what does it look like? Verse 2 answers that question in a somewhat surprising way. “By this we know that we love the children of God.” What would we expect to be an answer to that question? “Well you would help other children of God. You would give support to other children of God. You would bless other children of God in some tangible way.”

But John says “this is how we know that we love the children of God – when we love God and obey His commandments. So did you catch that? We know we love other Christians when we love God and keep His commandments. That seems disconnected. How can we love another Christian if we’re busy over here loving God and keeping God’s commandments?

Well first we have to recognize that John equates loving God with keeping His commandments. We show our love for God by keeping His commands. Jesus said “If you love me you will obey what I command?” So we love God by keeping His commandments.

But how does this connect with love for His children – or other Christians. Well God gives us a lot of commandments about others. Love one another. Be kind to one another. Bear with one another. Forgive one another. Teach one another. Bear one another’s burdens. So when we obey these commands we love God. But we also love other believers. That’s Christianity on a much different level than some live it today.

Now think about the cage rattling implications of this especially for some who call themselves Christians.

Some people identify themselves as Christians. But to them, Christianity is basically being nice to other people and attending the occasional religious service. You may have friends or family like this. If you asked them if they loved you, they might say yes. But if they have no real active love relationship with God and no real desire to obey His commandments how can they actually love you in the way God commands? One commentator writes this – the surest way to fail in the responsibility to love others is to come up short in our love for God and keeping His commandments. It raises questions about whether or not that person is really born of God.

Those born of God believe that Jesus is the Christ and follow Him. They love God the Father. They love other Christians by loving God and keeping His commandments. But they don't just keep God's commandments because they have to. They begin to see God's commandments as something good. This is another indicator of someone born of God. **Indicator #4 – They keep God's commandments which are not burdensome.** Verse 3 – For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.

Now when you think of laws, do you think of freedom or burdens? Do you imagine joy or duty? Do you see fun or boredom? We live in a society dominated by autonomous individualism. We don't like others telling us what we can and cannot do. So laws, rules and commandments limit us. They restrict us. We naturally don't like that. But we must alter our view of commandments when they come from God. Some human commands are foolish and not well thought out. But God's commands give life. They show us how to relate to God and others. They sketch a picture of the God honoring life.

John had to struggle through this. Remember John was one of those two brothers who thought they were pretty hot stuff and deserved the highest places of honor. Yet now he submits himself to Christ's commandments. The Holy Spirit worked in his heart to show him that obedience to God's commands was the way to life. And Jesus lived in obedience to God's commands. He submitted to his Father's will. He prayed "not mine but your will be done." Submission to God's will, while often not easy, is by far the highest good. God's commands are not just words on a page or a list of rules on the wall. Our loving Heavenly Father gives us these commands for our good. People born of God begin to delight in God's commands. Yet we face these challenges often. E.g. Carpet cleaning van – accident – did not take any info – didn't know I was supposed to – rented van. All day I thought about whether or not I would tell my boss

what happened. After all the van was a bit beat up – no would know. But after it came time to return the van, I told the truth, ready to pay for the damage. My boss went to the rental guy – passed on the info and the rental guy looked at the bumper and said don't worry it's already beat up. What an amazing incredible joy it was to get off work with a clear conscience.

So maybe one way you can test this in yourself is to think about the primary reasons why you don't give in to temptation. So imagine yourself in some situation where you face temptation to do something, think something, say something or watch something you know is wrong. With that situation in mind, what comes up as reasons not to do this?

"It's a rule so I guess I have to follow it." That's following a code with no heart conviction. It's like deciding to go the speed limit on a road because there's a sign there. But if the sign or law wasn't there, you'd punch it and fly down the road.

"I might get caught." That expresses fear of exposure but not a desire to quit sin.

"Someone else told me this would be bad for me." So this looks more at how much you might respect that person's viewpoint or listen to them.

"It might look bad." (So the greater concern is how we look to others than whether or not we actually want to go ahead and sin or not).

"It might hurt somebody else." That's a good reason to not give in to temptation. We're beginning to think beyond our own desires.

But here's the greatest reason. "It will hurt God. It will grieve God. It will damage our relationship." I believe friends that one of the greatest indicators of growth in our lives and love for God is that we think about how our behavior and choices impact Him more than anything else. When we begin to think like this, God's laws are not burdensome. They are hard but He will give us the power to obey.

Finally, **Indicator #5 - that a person has been born of God. - They overcome the world through their personal faith in Christ.**

Verse 4 – "For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world – our faith." Everyone born of God will have some experience in overcoming the world. The world opposes God.

It is fed by the spirit of the anti-Christ. It shows up in the outlook, standards and preoccupation of a godless, secular society. According to 1 John 2:15-17, it includes the cravings of sinful man, the lust of the eyes and the boasting of what he has and does. Sometimes the world shows up in false teaching. Sometimes it shows up in persecution. But people born of God overcome the world by faith. Verse 5 – Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? It is possible to overcome what this world invites us to or throws at us.

But it's not easy. Jesus asks "What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? (Matt. 16:26). But we live in a world that turns the question around. "What good is eternal redemption if you lose the world? People all around us value the world's enticements more highly than the benefits of spiritual rebirth through the message of Christ. They are like the rich young ruler if they even take the trouble to understand the gospel. Once they hear it, they go away sad, because its benefits seem to pale alongside the apparent, assumed superior advantages of allegiance to the current world order. But their loyalty to the temporary is ultimately a mistake and utter loss. To receive the gospel promise – to be spiritually born from God – is an immense victory. We can only overcome the world by faith in Christ (verse 5). We have to turn to Jesus who has the power and ability to save us from the power of this world.

Those born of God overcome the world whenever they say no to it.

How do you know if you've been born of God? Ask yourself:

- Do I believe that Jesus is the Christ?
- Do I love God?
- Do I love others?
- Do I delight in obeying God's commandments?
- Am I overcoming the world through the power of Christ?

You may be lacking in strength right now. You may not be on a spiritual mountaintop. You may be struggling spiritually or dry. But that doesn't mean that you're not born of God. You're here today – you could have slept in; you could have done something else; but you came here. Though you don't always show it, you do love God. You confess

Jesus is the Christ and you want to follow Him. You actually do love God's people or are growing to love them. You do keep some of God's commandments. You have experience in overcoming the world. All these indicate that God is at work in your life and that are born of Him.

Or maybe you don't see any of these markers in your life – can't confess Jesus is the Christ; don't really love God; don't love God's people; little desire to keep the commandments; not overcoming the world. Turn to Christ for the first time. – Maybe you think you have to do something or wait until your good enough to come to God. But being born of God is a work of God. You must put your faith in Him to do that work. Will you come to Him in faith today?

Or turn back to Christ – in that area; with that person who you struggle to love; with your love for God. May God continue His great work of spiritual renewal in our lives.