

RECOGNIZING HIS CHILDREN

“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 a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother.” (1 Jn 3:10)

In May of 1999 Paula Johnson filed a \$31,000,000 law suit against the University of Virginia Hospital because her baby was accidentally switched with another child at birth. Unfortunately, the mistake was not discovered for several years. The true identity of these children was not established by where they lived, what they knew, or how they talked. Their true identity was something much deeper than that. The DNA “image” or “identity” of the parent is an integral part of every child. It is present in every drop of blood and every strand of hair. Genetic testing can prove the true identity of a child regardless of language, intelligence or education.

But now let us apply this common sense approach to recognizing the children of God. Unconverted people can be taught “correct” doctrinal positions. They can “join” the “right” church and conform to the “right” rituals. They can repeat like a parrot the particular “shibboleths” that identify them as mainstream members. Their true identity, however, is determined by something much deeper than that.

Just as we bear the “image” of our earthy father, we also bear the “image” of our Heavenly Father. When we are “born again” of His incorruptible seed the transformation is so profound that we are considered to be “new creations”. The “nature” or “image” of our Heavenly Father is manifest in every aspect of our being. Read again the inspired words of John and note the following:

- Whoever does what is right is righteous just as He is righteous (1 John 3:7).
- He who does what is sinful is of the devil (vs 8)
- No one who is born of God continues in sin because God’s seed remains in him. (vs. 9).
- This is how we know who the children of God are (vs. 10).

Notice that John references “behavior” in identifying the children of God. We do not demonstrate that we are a child of God by the cerebral recitation of correct doctrine. We demonstrate it with our lives. We have five children in our own personal family. Our oldest and youngest are separated by 16 years. The fact that they were different in size, knowledge, and ability did not mean that they were not our children. Obviously, maturity will even affect our understanding of Scripture. For example, “Avoid every kind of evil” (1 Thess. 5:22) will certainly not mean the same thing to a toddler as to a teenager.

So, in the early church, the children of God lived righteous lives while holding a wide variety of doctrinal views. There were thousands of Christian Jews who were “zealous for the law” (Acts 21:20). They continued to worship in the Temple, circumcise their children, and observe all the Jewish feasts. The gentile Christians did none of these things. A major split was avoided by requiring only four necessary things (see Acts 15:29). The fact that Jews and gentiles worshiped on different days, in different ways did not mean that they were not brethren. The fact that they ate different food, and had different views on social issues did not mean that they were not brethren (see Rom. 14). Of course their conduct was not characterized by fornication, greed, and idolatry for “He who does what is sinful is of the devil”. The children of God are not to associate with such people (1 Cor. 5:9).

Our text points that the child of God also “loves his brother” (See also 1 Jn. 5:1). Jesus gave to love a priority over everything else. He said: “By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” (John 13:35) It is “the most excellent way” (1 Cor. 13:1). It is more important than faith or hope and endures forever (1 Cor. 13:8 - 13). This “love” however is not “learned” in a catechism class, it is the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22). It is a “by product” of being “born again”. Even sinners can love those who are lovely, but the children of God stand out because we also love those who are hateful and abusive (Lk. 6:27 - 36).

Keep your eyes open for those who are doing what is right. This is not only a biblical way

to find estranged brethren, it is also a standard by which to recognize false ones.