

Two kinds of children, and two kinds of fathers

When the Bible says "sin is lawlessness" (1 John 3:4), it means that those who practice sin manifest their father: the devil. The Bible says that "the devil has been sinning from the beginning" (1 John 3:8), because he has been lawless from the beginning. That is, the devil rebelled against God's just and righteous laws, and has incited rebellion against God ever since. On the other hand, those who claim God as Father will manifest the family likeness: practicing righteousness. This is how Robert Candlish, a Scottish minister of the 19th century, put it:

As it is the nature of God to be righteous, so it is the nature of every one who is born of God to be righteous also. So he who is preeminently the Son of God is righteous; and we who are children of God in him are "righteous as he is righteous." But his being righteous necessitates his doing righteousness; to imagine otherwise in his case would be a profane calumny. So also to think that we can be righteous as he is righteous, if our being righteous does not necessitate our doing righteousness, must be a gross and grievous delusion. On the other hand, it is the devil's nature to be evil; and being evil, he cannot but be doing evil. If we are doing evil, "doing sin,"—that proves our identity of nature with the devil; we are "of the devil." And being of the devil, the originator of sin, "sinning from the beginning,"—we cannot be children of God as Christ is his Son. For he was "manifested for this very purpose, that he might destroy the works of the devil." [...]

Thus two parentages are here contrasted. Two fathers, as it were, desire to have us as children. They are wide as the poles asunder. Of the one relationship it is the characteristic not to sin of the other, to be always sinning. The one father never has sinned, never could sin, being the "righteous Father." The other has been always a sinner; sinning from the beginning; his first act being to sin. Each father imparts his own character to his children. The virtue or the vice; the wholesome purity or the poisonous matter; the sweet charm or the sour taint; runs in the blood. The children of the one father have infused into them the seed or germ of his impeccability; his being of such a nature that it is impossible for him to sin. The children of the other inherit his absolute incapacity of not sinning; his being of such a nature that it is morally impossible for him not to sin.

It is a terrible inheritance. It is the devil's nature to sin. When we sin we give proof of its being our nature too. And it is a nature which we derive from him. It was he that communicated it to us. Our relation to him, therefore, in respect of our thus sharing his nature, is very close. It may be true that it is only in a figurative sense that we can be called "children of the devil," or said to be "of the devil." Still the figure has in it a sad reality. If it is natural for us to sin, he is the father of that nature in us. His seed is in us; the seed of his nature, his natural life, which is to sin, to do nothing but commit sin. [...]

Root and branch, the "works of the devil must be destroyed." The seed, the germ, the principle of all his works must be eradicated. Suspicion, dislike, servile dread, criminal sullenness, self-justifying pride, must all be scotched and killed. These are the devil's works. They must be all destroyed. Let me look to the Son of God as he has been and is manifested; and are they not, through my so looking, destroyed? I cannot think and feel, with reference to God and his authority and law, as the devil does, when I look to the Son of God manifested for this very purpose, that I may think and feel as he does; that God may be to me what he is to him, and his law to me what it is to him that thus in me he may "destroy the works of the devil."

