

LifeWay Family Bible Series for July 11: Christians should believe, belong & behave_62804

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Christians should believe, belong & behave

1 John 3:23-24; 5:1-5, 9-13, 18-19

By Rodney McGlothlin

First Baptist Church, College Station

Do you like tests? I have often wondered if Jesus' disciples ever said to him, "Lord, is this stuff gonna be on the test?"

To the best of my knowledge, Jesus never offered his disciples a written examination. The book of Acts, however, tells us the story of some pretty strong testing that took place. John went through a bit of a trial himself on the island of Patmos. He passed with flying colors. When your faith is tested in the crucible of life, how do you measure up?

You will find the phrase "born of God" used seven times in the New Testament. All of them are in John's writings. He proposed a bit of test to help his readers determine where they stood in this journey of discipleship. His discipleship examination consisted of three parts-believing, behaving

and belonging.

“Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God” (1 John 5:1).



It seems a pretty easy test. If you believe Jesus is the Christ, according to John, you have been born of God. To believe he is the Christ is to believe he is God's chosen Messiah. It is to put your trust in him alone as God's plan to save sinful man.

We remember John 3:16, “That whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” For John, this test of faith is not something that waits until the end of time. Judgment is now. It is not delayed. The one who believes has life now. The one who does not believe is “condemned already” (John 3:18).

What do you believe about Jesus? It is the essential question of life. It is more than a matter of personal opinion. It is a matter of Holy Spirit activity. When Peter confessed Jesus as the Christ, Jesus said, “Flesh and blood did not reveal this to you.”

We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin (1 John 5:18).

Christians are folks who should behave. Faith in Jesus Christ is behavioral in nature. In the Great Commission, Jesus said we should “teach them to obey all things” (Matthew 28:20). Let me make up two words to describe believers. We are obeyers and behavers.

I was an education major at the University of Houston. One of the things we had to write in our education classes was “behavioral objectives.” It was

more than a statement of what material we wanted to teach. It had to be a statement that reflected some change in the life of the student.

Grace is behavioral as well. We do not change life patterns or behaviors in order to receive God's grace. He gives it to us freely. But once he gives us his grace, he begins a reformation project in our lives.

I don't know who writes those real estate ads you see in the paper. My favorite is "a real handyman's special." You know you are getting a dog of a house if you buy one of these. Yet they can be beautiful cost-efficient homes for the person willing to work at remodeling.

The Christian life is one of continual remodeling. The person "born of God" is in the process of continual transformation by the grace of God. When Jesus moves into a human life, he brings his tools with him and starts remodeling the heart, one room at a time.

"Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God" (1 John 4:7).

For me, this is a word about belonging to a family. "Let us love one another." Those who have been born of God love one another. Those who have been born of God are brothers and sisters in faith.

When you look at the early church, you get a picture of a group of people who belonged to one another. They shared their provisions. They shared in the work of ministry. They experienced real fellowship. They worshipped together. They suffered together. They went to jail together. They broke bread together and gave mighty testimony to the resurrection of the Lord.

How can you describe the church today? What are those "born of God" like? They are believing, behaving and belonging.

Is there an order in which these should come? We tend to think that

believing is prerequisite to behaving or belonging. It was not for me. My parents expected me to behave in the manner prescribed by our Lord even before I put my personal faith in him. I felt very much a part of my home church before faith dawned in me. I did not yet belong to a believer's church, but in my faith family of origin I was made to feel welcome and a part. I belonged there before I believed.

Perhaps others, sensing a need for radical change in their lives, sought a place that would help them behave. They came to a church looking for a change of life. They found more.

People today are looking for places where they can belong. They are looking for places that will help them to live well. They need to believe in Jesus. They need to be "born of God." Our churches must become places where believers are believing, behaving and belonging. Others will join us in a quest like that.

Questions for discussion

- ◆ Which is the hardest for you-to believe, belong or behave?
- ◆ Are these good criteria for measuring faith? What other things might you substitute or offer in addition to these?
- ◆ How would demonstrating these things draw others to faith?

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