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A Letter to Dear Children, Part 4

Liars and Light

Text: 1 John 2:3-11

May I see your hand if you know Barack Obama? No, you don’t know Mr. Obama. You know *of* him. Few *know* him. In the first century, folks were quick to raise their hands and say they *knew* God. John wants to draw a distinction between being *acquainted* with God and *knowing* Him.

Let’s review. John has

* Stated the reason for his writing (1:1-4)
* Affirmed the unique character of God (1:5). This is one of three definitions of God, all penned by John (God is Spirit-John 4:24; God is light-1 John 1:5; God is love- 1 John 4:8)
* Addressed the practical implications of walking and living in the light (1:5-10)
* Reminded the readers, and us, that because of Christ’s perfect, exemplary life and sacrificial death, we can be delivered from the tyranny and the dominion and the control of sin.

Now, back to *knowing* God.

How do we *know* that we *know*?

John says there is a measurement. Obedience is a sign of knowledge of the Christ (v.3). If we say we *love* God but do not *obey* God, the truth is not in us and we are liars.

The opposite is true. If we live a life of obedience we, by that life, demonstrate that we *know* and *love* God.

Verse 7- This is not new. Quite the contrary, this is as old as that which was from the beginning. John likes to talk about history. Note how often he refers to that which is old (1:1; 2:7, 13,14, 24; 3:8). “The beginning” could refer to either the beginning of creation or, perhaps, the beginning of these believers’ relationship with Jesus. John will introduce new concepts as he goes along, but only after he has reminded his readers of the importance of that which has gone on before. In verse 7, “I write no new commandment”.

In verse 8, “Again, a new commandment”. Which is it? For John, one need not choose between tradition and contemporaneity. John will celebrate old teaching **and** new teaching. Old= “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength” (Deuteronomy 6:5). New= “A new commandment I give you, that you love one another.” (John 13:34).

John will say there are two ways to prove that we are people of God. The first is obedience (3-4; 3:22, 24; 5:2, 3). The second is love(9-11; John 13:34). According to John, God is light (1:5). To say we are people of God is to say we are people of light. To say we are “walking in the light” is to say we are people of God. John likes to speak of pairs of realities.

* Death and life
* Knowing *about* God and *knowing* God
* Darkness and light
* Truthbearers and liars

John will say that love is light, and hate is darkness and that spouting one while practicing the other puts us in a dangerous place, spiritually. How tempting it is to pay lip service to an idea but not practice it! So, it is with love. John will use a few terms interchangeably. Fellowship with God (1:3) = walking in the light (1:7) =Loving other people(2:9-10).

In this text, John is taking a not-so-subtle jab at the Gnostics. This was a group of people whose name comes from the Greek word for *knowledge*(gnosis)

Without knowledge= *a gnosis,* from which we get English word, *agnostic.* Cf. 1 Timothy 6:20.

The Gnostics taught a simple form of dualism: that which is physical and of matter is evil. That which is non-physical, that is, spiritual is good. If you wanted to escape the physical, you had to receive enlightenment from a divine redeemer. The inquiring person had to go through a few levels of revelation and then become knowledgeable.

John wants to say, knowing God is not that complex. We don't demonstrate knowledge of God by our embracing a tangled philosophy. We come to God through profession of faith in Jesus and then we obey God and love other people. Holding on to hatred while also saying you’re spiritual is ridiculous, says John. He will say that if you hate your brother or sister, you are *showing* that you are in darkness (11).

John is so concerned that his readers take their faith seriously, that he uses what sounds like harsh language. Listen to it: “Liars!” More than once, John will say that when confronted with the choice between truth bearing and lying, the saints should choose truth. When they fail to choose truth, this John, who uses affectionate terms to speak with these readers, calls them liars (1:8; 2:4, 21-22; 3:18-19).

Even our Lord Jesus occasionally spoke harshly, to underline the seriousness of a matter (John 8:44, 55- liar; Matthew 23:13-33- hypocrite; blind guide; serpents; brood of vipers)

John says you and I have a choice. We can choose to live as light or live as liars. Liars *seek* the darkness. People of light *denounce* the darkness.

Charles Hodge (1797-1878), Presbyterian theologian who taught at Princeton Seminary for his entire career, said,

*It often happens...that men are very pious without being very good. Their religion expends itself in devotional feelings and services, while the evil passions of their nature remains unsubdued.* (D.B. Calhoun. *Princeton Seminary, vol. 1: Faith and Learning, 1812-1868)*

***Illus.***

Robert W. Yarbrough, in his academic commentary on 1, 2 and 3 John, tells the story of a couple who visited a church and then made an appointment to meet with the pastor. The man of the couple quizzed the pastor about his views of the Great Tribulation, a staple of the Left Behind series. The man told the pastor that he couldn't sit under that pastor’s teaching unless that pastor and the man could agree on Great Tribulation views. The man didn’t mention the face that the woman he with, with whom he lived, was not his wife. (Yarbrough, p. 105, note 17)

John wants to make it clear: Our goal ought not be to master how to *talk about* the light. The goal is to *walk* in it and to *walk* in truth. We are to *live* this faith, *abiding* in the light (v. 10). People who walk in darkness(v.11) don’t know where they’re going. To be blinded by light is good. To be blinded by darkness(v.11) is not.

***Illus.***

A pastor is ending up his sermon one Sunday morning when he says, "Ok, now next week I am going to preach a sermon on lying. In preparation, this week I want you all to read Mark chapter 17."

The next Sunday the pastor begins his sermon:

"Ok I hope we all had a good weekend. Now, let me see. Who all read Mark chapter 17?"

He waited a few minutes as he watched many in the congregation raise their hands.

"Well, since Mark only has 16 chapters, let me begin my sermon on lying!"

Beloved of Crossroads, let us give up lying and walk in the light!!

Amen