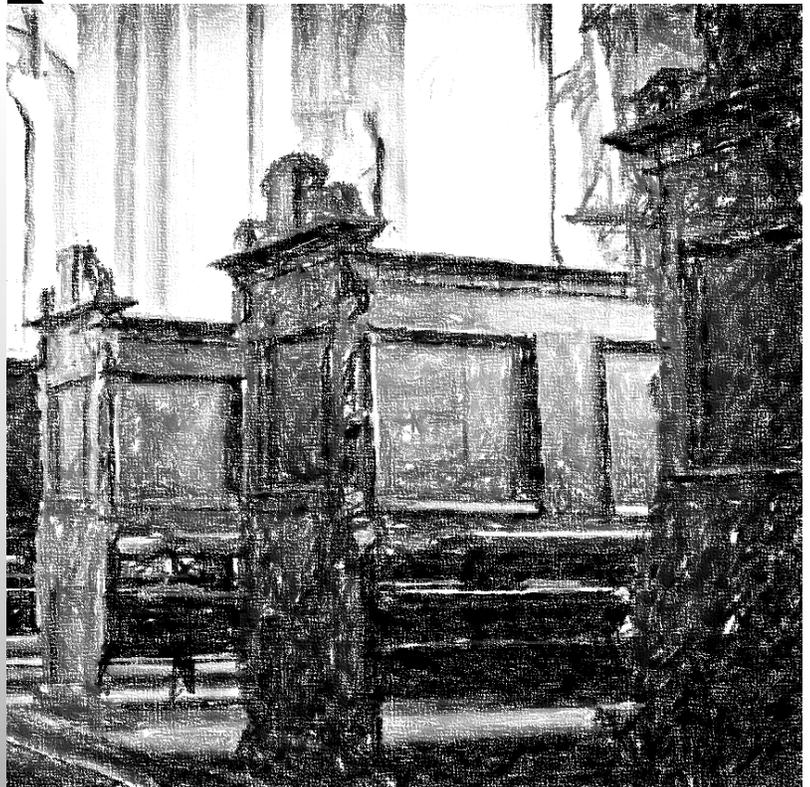




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# The Epistle of First John

Responding to Threats Against The Church's One Foundation

1 John 2:3-11

How do we know that we know the Lord when everybody else seems to know that they know the Lord too? For example, if Johnny says that he knows God and Susie says that she knows God, yet they have vastly different perceptions and statements concerning God, how do we know who is right? The Apostle John answers this question in verses three and following.

You see, we must understand that we do not know the Lord based upon our own rational thinking, mystical feelings, and/or opinions. But instead, John tells us that we know God because we know Jesus. And we know Jesus, because we know and embrace the instructions of Jesus.

Now, we have to be a bit careful with verses three and four. Too many legalistic churches misread these verses and ensnare the original meaning in works righteousness. More specifically, we have to understand that the word 'commandment' – according to John – is not to be understood narrowly as in the 10 Commandments. But instead, when John uses the word 'command' or

'commandment,' he is referring to the teachings, lessons, pronouncements, and testimony of Jesus. Namely he is referring to all the teachings of Jesus, which include both Law and Gospel.

Secondly, when John says that we know the Lord, when we 'obey' the commandments, he is not meaning obeying a code of conduct. The word obey is not merely marking off completed duties on a checklist. Instead, the word 'obey' means to embrace, keep, hold dear, pay attention to, take to heart, and treasure the instructions and lessons of Law and Gospel from Christ. Again, the word obey is not just merely keeping a code of conduct but it captures an embracement and treasuring of all that Jesus taught and did.

And so, whoever says that they know the Lord yet does not embrace the teachings of Jesus, he or she is a lying fool. Without Jesus, one cannot know the Father. And without embracing and holding to the teachings of Jesus, one cannot know the Father, or even Jesus Himself. How can one claim to know the Father and His Son, without

opening a Bible and treasuring the teachings of the Bible?

John calls it as it is. If one does not embrace the teachings of Jesus, the person cannot have Truth. A Christianity without Jesus is a lie. A Christianity without Jesus is teaching is a lie. Saying one is a Christian, while clearly not holding, keeping, treasuring, and paying attention to Jesus' Word is living a lie.

Keep in mind from our earlier lessons that John is clearly distinguishing between Light and dark. And so he is doing the same here in chapter 2 as well. Consider the following chart to see the Light vs. dark binary:

<b>Dark</b>	<b>Light</b>
Rejects Jesus' teaching	Accepts Jesus' teaching
Does not treasure Jesus' teaching	Embraces Jesus' teaching
Does not walk like Jesus	Walks like Jesus
Hates brother while claiming Light	Loves brother and lives in Light

To the point, John does not allow for hypocrisy. According to John, a person who never attends church, does not treasure the Word, lives in constant grudges with everyone around them, while claiming to walk like Jesus... John would say they are part of darkness, not Light regardless of how they define themselves.

And so this section of John's epistle should indeed unsettle us. The reason why, we can see very clearly how our old Adam longs to neglect Jesus' teaching, loves to hold grudges, and loves to dance in the darkness while claiming to be in the Light. This is the reason why we Christians are always needing repentance.

As a Christian, the problem is not that you and I are striving to achieve and acquire the Light. Christ is not a carrot on the end of the stick that we are always pursuing. No! We have Christ and know Christ because we have His Word! The problem is not us trying to get to the Light at the end of the tunnel but that we want to leave the Light and venture off to the darkness of tunnels. As an old hymn rightly states, "prone to wander, prone to leave the God that I love!" Yes, we fail to abide and stay put in Jesus' Word and Sacraments. We wander away into darkness, and instead of repenting of darkness (returning to the Light of our Baptisms) we go the way of hypocrisy – pretending that we are in the Light while still in the dark. Oh what a deceitful and treacherous place to be! Christ is light and in Him there is no darkness; we cannot have our cake and eat it too. That is why we need to repent – to repent daily, returning to the Light of Christ.

