

Live in the Light

1 John 2:3-11

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St. Paul's Lutheran, North Freedom

We know that we have come to know him if we keep his commands. Whoever says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar; and the truth is not in that person. But if anyone obeys his word, God's love is truly made complete in them. This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did.

Dear friends, I am not writing you a new command but an old one, which you have had since the beginning. This old command is the message you have heard. Yet I am writing you a new command; its truth is seen in him and in you, because the darkness is passing and the true light is already shining.

Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates a brother or sister is still in the darkness. Anyone who loves their brother and sister lives in the light, and there is nothing in them to make them stumble. But anyone who hates a brother or sister is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness. They do not know where they are going, because the darkness has blinded them. (1 John 2:3-11 NIV)

Dear followers of Jesus, the Light of the world:

What would you think of a person who says he can see clearly as though it were broad daylight, even though it's the middle of the night, and not even the moon and stars are shining because of cloud cover? And there's no artificial light, either; the person doesn't even have a flashlight or the light of a phone to help him see. We would call such a person delusional, crazy, a liar, and dangerous to others who might trust or follow that person.

John was the last living apostle of Jesus. Writing over 60 years after Jesus' resurrection and ascension, he warned about those who were claiming to be in the light—the light of Jesus—but they weren't living that way. John's inspired words urge all of us to **Live in the Light**. Live in the light of God's Word, the truth, and not lies. Live in the light of love, and not hatred.

In the middle and last parts of the first century AD, a false teaching called "Gnosticism" arose in the Christian Church. "Gnosticism" is derived from the Greek word for knowledge. The Gnostics claimed to have a superior knowledge to regular Christians, that they had more spiritual knowledge than what the Bible and what Jesus had. For instance, they denied the virgin birth and the bodily resurrection of Christ; they separated the heavenly Christ from the earthly Jesus, claiming they were two different beings. They claimed they had the true light, more than the Bible's light.

It reminds us today of how some swallow the lies and false claims of heretics. Liberal false teachings deny that the Bible is really God's Word and claim that you need a special knowledge that enlightens you, that the Spirit comes apart from the Bible. Some lodges do the same thing, in their secret societies they have this special knowledge of God, more than what the Bible says. Cults such as the Mormons claim special revelations from God above and beyond what the Bible teaches, denying the incarnate Christ and the power of his resurrection. They claim they have the light. But they are not based on truth, only lies.

John teaches in this letter what true knowledge is: "We know that we have come to know him if we keep his commands....if anyone obeys his word." John has more than just the commandments in

mind here, but all of God's inspired Word. To "keep" this Word and "obey" it has to do with holding on to all of what it says, holding on to all of God's teachings as the truth. John adds that "God's love is truly made complete in them" when anyone obeys or keeps his word. God's love to save this world reaches its goal when we live in the light of God's truth in obedience, and not in the lies of false teachers.

"Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did." It is not enough for us to say, "I know Jesus, I know what the Bible says," and then go out and keep on sinning. God shines the light of his Word so that we will live in the light, not live in lies, not live in sin. Don't fall for Satan's lies, "You will not die if you do this sin"—his lie to Eve; his lies want to make darkness light, evil good, lies as truth. Remember the psalm verse, "Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path." Live in the light, in the truth of God's Word.

John tells us that this is not a "new command, but an old one." You've had it since the beginning, the "message you have heard." Yet at the same time, John writes, "I am writing you a new command; its truth is seen in him and in you, because the darkness is passing and the true light is already shining." John was likely thinking of that evening, 60 years before, when he and the disciples were dining with Jesus at their last supper and he told them, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another" (Jn. 13:34). Jesus is the one who makes the old command new, because of his perfect love for us. Living in the light also means living in Jesus' love.

Here again John warns: "Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates a brother or sister is still in the darkness." Hatred toward anyone is not compatible with the light of Jesus' love. Later in this letter John explains why: "Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life residing in him" (1 John 3:15).

Sometimes Christians get accused of being hateful. It's especially in connection with our teaching on LGBTQ matters. When we say as the Bible says, "God will judge all the sexually immoral," including those who do homosexual sins, some will say, "You're hating gay people." No, it is out of love for God and for gays when we point out what they're doing is sinful, because we want them to repent and receive Jesus' unconditional forgiveness. At the same time, let's make sure when we speak the truth, that we convey love for the sinner and not hatred. John reminds us: "Anyone who hates a brother or sister is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness."

You see, living in the light means living in love. John writes: "Anyone who loves their brother and sister lives in the light, and there is nothing in them to make them stumble." Understand that correctly: Our love does not cause us to get in the light. Jesus' love did that. His perfect love led him to obey God's law perfectly for us sinners. Jesus' perfect love led him to suffer and die for our sins and pay for them completely. That is how Jesus is the "light" that has dawned "on those living in the land of deep darkness" as we heard in Isaiah's prophecy (Isa. 9:2). Jesus revealed himself as the "Light of the world," chasing away the darkness of sin and death.

We live because of Jesus' light and love. Now that we have seen the light, let's live in the light. Don't wallow in hatred, which belongs to darkness. Live in the light by forgiving one another as you have been forgiven, loving one another as you have been loved, and living in truth and love. Amen.