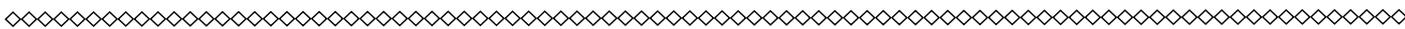




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Sermon Brief
Text: 1 John 1:5-2:17
Title: Do You Know God?
Lorin L. Cranford

Seeking to faith-
fully proclaim
the whole coun-
cil of God in
scripture!



INTRODUCTION

I have a question for you today? “Do you know God?” What kind of question is that? For people gathered in church to worship God, such a question seems strange. But in the context of our scripture passage from 1 John 1:5-2:17, the question is quite natural and important to raise in a church setting. Turn with me in your Bibles to this passage as we read it:¹

1.5 This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. 6 If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; 7 but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.

8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

2.1 My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have

1·5 Καὶ ἔστιν αὕτη ἡ ἀγγελία ἣν ἀκηκόαμεν ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀναγγέλλομεν ὑμῖν, ὅτι ὁ θεὸς φῶς ἐστὶν καὶ σκοτία ἐν αὐτῷ οὐκ ἔστιν οὐδεμία. 1·6 Ἐὰν εἴπωμεν ὅτι κοινωνίαν ἔχομεν μετ’ αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐν τῷ σκότει περιπατῶμεν, ψευδόμεθα καὶ οὐ ποιοῦμεν τὴν ἀλήθειαν· 1·7 ἐὰν δὲ ἐν τῷ φωτὶ περιπατῶμεν ὡς αὐτὸς ἐστὶν ἐν τῷ φωτὶ, κοινωνίαν ἔχομεν μετ’ ἀλλήλων καὶ τὸ αἷμα Ἰησοῦ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ καθαρίζει ἡμᾶς ἀπὸ πάσης ἁμαρτίας. 1·8 ἐὰν εἴπωμεν ὅτι ἁμαρτίαν οὐκ ἔχομεν, ἑαυτοὺς πλανῶμεν καὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια οὐκ ἔστιν ἐν ἡμῖν. 1·9 ἐὰν ὁμολογῶμεν τὰς ἁμαρτίας ἡμῶν, πιστὸς ἐστὶν καὶ δίκαιος, ἵνα ἀφῆς ἡμῖν τὰς ἁμαρτίας καὶ καθάρισῃ ἡμᾶς ἀπὸ πάσης ἀδικίας. 1·10 ἐὰν εἴπωμεν ὅτι οὐχ ἡμαρτήκαμεν ψεύστην ποιοῦμεν αὐτὸν καὶ ὁ λόγος αὐτοῦ οὐκ ἔστιν ἐν ἡμῖν.

2·1 Τεκνία μου, ταῦτα γράφω ὑμῖν ἵνα μὴ ἁμάρτητε. καὶ ἐὰν τις ἁμάρτη, παράκλητον ἔχομεν πρὸς τὸν πατέρα Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν δίκαιον· 2·2 καὶ αὐτὸς ἰλασμός ἐστὶν περὶ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν, οὐ περὶ τῶν ἡμετέρων δὲ μόνον ἀλλὰ καὶ περὶ ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου. 2·3 Καὶ ἐν τούτῳ γινώσκουμεν ὅτι ἐγνώκαμεν αὐτόν, ἐὰν τὰς ἐντολὰς αὐτοῦ τηρῶμεν. 2·4 ὁ λέγων ὅτι Ἔγνωκα αὐτόν καὶ τὰς ἐντολὰς αὐτοῦ μὴ τηρῶν, ψεύστης ἐστὶν καὶ ἐν τούτῳ ἡ ἀλήθεια οὐκ ἔστιν· 2·5 ὃς δ’ ἂν τηρῇ αὐτοῦ τὸν λόγον, ἀληθῶς ἐν τούτῳ ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ θεοῦ τετελείωται, ἐν τούτῳ γινώσκουμεν ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ ἐσμεν. 2·6 ὁ λέγων ἐν αὐτῷ μένειν ὀφείλει καθὼς ἐκεῖνος περιεπάτησεν καὶ αὐτὸς οὕτως περιπατεῖν.

2·7 Ἀγαπητοὶ οὐκ ἐντολὴν καινὴν γράφω ὑμῖν ἀλλ’ ἐντολὴν παλαιὰν ἣν εἶχετε ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς· ἡ ἐντολὴ ἡ παλαιὰ ἐστὶν ὁ λόγος ὃν ἠκούσατε. 2·8 πάλιν ἐντολὴν καινὴν γράφω ὑμῖν, ὃ ἐστὶν ἀληθὲς ἐν αὐτῷ καὶ ἐν ὑμῖν, ὅτι ἡ σκοτία παράγεται καὶ τὸ φῶς τὸ ἀληθινὸν ἤδη φαίνει. 2·9 ὁ λέγων ἐν τῷ φωτὶ εἶναι καὶ τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ μισῶν ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ ἐστὶν ἕως ἄρτι. 2·10 ὁ ἀγαπῶν τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ ἐν τῷ φωτὶ μένει καὶ σκάνδαλον ἐν αὐτῷ οὐκ ἔστιν· 2·11 ὁ δὲ μισῶν τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ ἐστὶν καὶ ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ περιπατεῖ καὶ οὐκ οἶδεν ποῦ ὑπάγει, ὅτι ἡ σκοτία ἐτύφλωσεν τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς αὐτοῦ.

2·12 Γράφω ὑμῖν, τεκνία,
ὅτι ἀφέονται ὑμῖν αἱ ἁμαρτίαι διὰ τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ.

2·13 γράφω ὑμῖν, πατέρες,
ὅτι ἐγνώκατε τὸν ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς.
γράφω ὑμῖν, νεανίσκοι,
ὅτι νενικήκατε τὸν πονηρόν.

2·14 ἔγραψα ὑμῖν, παιδιά,
ὅτι ἐγνώκατε τὸν πατέρα.
ἔγραψα ὑμῖν, πατέρες,
ὅτι ἐγνώκατε τὸν ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς.
ἔγραψα ὑμῖν, νεανίσκοι,
ὅτι ἰσχυροὶ ἐστε
καὶ ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν ὑμῖν μένει
καὶ νενικήκατε τὸν πονηρόν.

2·15 Μὴ ἀγαπᾶτε τὸν κόσμον μηδὲ τὰ ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ. ἐὰν τις ἀγαπᾷ τὸν κόσμον, οὐκ ἔστιν ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ πατρὸς ἐν αὐτῷ· 2·16 ὅτι πᾶν τὸ ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ, ἡ ἐπιθυμία τῆς σαρκὸς καὶ ἡ ἐπιθυμία τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν καὶ ἡ ἀλαζονεία τοῦ βίου, οὐκ ἔστιν ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς ἀλλ’ ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου ἐστίν. 2·17 καὶ ὁ κόσμος παράγεται καὶ ἡ ἐπιθυμία αὐτοῦ, ὃ δὲ ποιῶν τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ μένει εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα.

an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; 2 and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

3 Now by this we may be sure that we know him, if we obey his commandments. 4 Whoever says, "I have come to know him," but does not obey his commandments, is a liar, and in such a person the truth does not exist; 5 but whoever obeys his word, truly in this person the love of God has reached perfection. By this we may be sure that we are in him: 6 whoever says, "I abide in him," ought to walk just as he walked.

7 Beloved, I am writing you no new commandment, but an old commandment that you have had from the beginning; the old commandment is the word that you have heard. 8 Yet I am writing you a new commandment that is true in him and in you, because F2 the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining. 9 Whoever says, "I am in the light," while hating a brother or sister, is still in the darkness. 10 Whoever loves a brother or sister lives in the light, and in such a person there is no cause for stumbling. 11 But whoever hates another believer is in the darkness, walks in the darkness, and does not know the way to go, because the darkness has brought on blindness.

12 I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven on account of his name. 13 I am writing to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I am writing to you, young people, because you have conquered the evil one. 14 I write to you, children, because you know the Father. I write to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young people, because you are strong and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one. 15 Do not love the world or the things in the world. The love of the Father is not in those who love the world; 16 for all that is in the world—the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, the pride in riches — comes not from the Father but from the world. 17 And the world and its desire are passing away, but those who do the will of God live forever.

In the context of late first century Christianity in and around ancient Ephesus, the apostle John wrote this letter largely to counteract a movement inside the Christian communities in that part of the world that was threatening the spiritual life of the churches. Later on this movement became known as Gnosticism and was severely condemned by church leaders all through the second century.

What appears to be the situation from an analysis of the contents of 1 John is a movement that made the mistake of taking contemporary Greek philosophical thinking as the foundation for redefining the content of the apostolic gospel message preached by Paul, Peter and the other apostles of Jesus. When the gospel was filtered through the Greek philosophy lenses, especially through Platonic dualism, it came out a very different message than the one the apostles preached. John saw in this great danger for the spiritual health and vitality of the churches who were coming under the influence of this strange teaching. The Gospel of Jesus Christ has been given once for all and remains changeless for all times. But these false teachers were remaking it into something very different. Thus the apostle wrote his letter attacking this false thinking and seeking to bring the churches back to the apostolic gospel.

We need to hear what John had to say because many of the same trends and tendencies of this ancient heresy can be found today among many Christian groups, especially among some Protestant Christian groups. Beyond that, many individual Christians adopt some of these attitudes advocated by the Gnostics even without realizing the root of such thinking or either danger.

Therefore, I want us today to take a brief look at the first two chapters of 1 John around the central theme of knowing God. These Gnostics claimed to know God, and know Him better than other believers of their time. John's contention, however, was that their supposed knowledge of God was false and a delusion. In reality they didn't know God at all! What John implies for us is the possibility of assuming we know God when in reality we don't know Him at all. Folks, such is spiritual suicide! And attention to this merits our careful attention if we are avoid making the same mistake as these people at Ephesus.

Do you really know God? The answer to that question depends on your answer to five other questions coming out of this scripture text.

BODY

I. **Are you walking in righteousness? 1:5-7**

Note what John said in verses five through seven to his initial readers toward the end of the first Christian century:

5 This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. 6 If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; 7 but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.

The Gnostics made much of the image of God as Light. But they missed the point of the image. In their writings beginning in the second century Light meant intellectual enlightenment, i.e., knowing. Thus comes their name Gnostic from the Greek word *gnosis* (γνῶσις) for knowing. God as Light meant to them illumination of the mind through coming to possess a special knowledge that elevated one to salvation. Salvation of the soul, that is, but not of the body. It was doomed to perish, and thus didn't matter. In a highly emotionally

charged 'conversion' experience -- verified by tongues speaking -- this secretive knowledge was given to the individual and had the impact of purifying his soul. It so elevated the soul from the corrupt material, bodily world that the soul became immune from sin. Thus nothing sinful the individual did in the body could impact this purified soul. They twisted, then, the image of God as Light into something it wasn't and then added Platonic dualism out of their own pagan world to the concept to produce this utterly false understanding.

God as Light brings understanding, but for John the Old Testament background of this image was the key. God as Light means moral purity. Darkness is not ignorance, as the Gnostics contended. It is sinful behavior and rebellion against God. It is moral impurity. John's point is simply that when one comes into contact with God, the utterly pure Light, sin and sinfulness has to vanish.

Thus these Gnostic teachers were telling the folks that they didn't need to worry about sin. It was no longer relevant to their 'Christian' life. Their ignorance of divine truth reflected the fact that they were lying and not practicing the Truth from God. They thought they had superior knowledge of God, but in reality they were totally ignorant of God. Then when they taught this theological garbage to others they were perpetrating nothing but a lie that had utterly nothing to do with God's Truth.

At the heart of this lie was the contention that sin no long mattered to the Christian. John knew better. Sin does matter. It put Jesus on the cross. Satan works overtime to induce the believer into sinful conduct. Christians face constant temptation to sin. Their old sinful nature, even though redeemed, remains in tact and a source of continual enticement to wrong doing. Therefore, believers can never afford to ignore sin and temptation that comes up against them.

All around the world today, millions of Christians have fallen prey to this same false thinking that sin doesn't matter in their lives. But it does! It matters big time! To ignore this and especially to deny this is to commit spiritual suicide! John declares that to fail to deal with sin as a supposed Christian means we are living a lie. Our claim to have fellowship with God is utterly false. Furthermore, we are not practicing the Truth of God when we are sinning but claiming to know God. God's Truth demands ethical behavior and serious attitudes toward sin. And to live in darkness with sinful conduct is the opposite of this.

Do you know God? In part, the answer to that question is determined by your attitude toward sin in your life. If you're ignoring it, or worse still, if you're denying sin is in your life, then under no circumstances can you legitimately claim to know God. It's just that simple and blunt.

The corrective to ignoring sin is walking in that light, just as Jesus walked in it through his early ministry. That is, our behavior must be consistent with God as pure Light. Walking is a metaphor for behavior in the New Testament. When our walk reflects the moral purity of God as Light marvelous blessings follow. John focuses on two of them here: 1) we have fellowship with one another; and 2) the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin. God's people must live in holiness and righteousness. In so doing, the community of believers grows strong and becomes an important source of encouragement and help in dealing with sin. Also, the cleansing of the blood of Jesus removes the sin before it has opportunity to do damage to our spiritual health.

God help us to be walking in the Light of God!

II. Do you realize your sinfulness before God? 1:8-2:2

Question two: are you aware of sinfulness in your life before God? This is John's contention in 1:8 through 2:2.

8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

1 My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; 2 and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

He follows much the same literary pattern as in the previous section. The 'what if' sections introduce the issue of sin and sinfulness. In verses eight through ten of chapter one, three 'what if' sentences are put on the table by John. The first and third one are virtually the same idea, but the 'what then' parts differ.

"If we say that we have no sin" (ἐὰν εἴπωμεν ὅτι ἁμαρτίαν οὐκ ἔχομεν) in verse eight becomes "if we say that we have not sinned" (ἐὰν εἴπωμεν ὅτι οὐχ ἡμαρτήκαμεν) in verse ten. The shift in wording only slightly changes the meaning. It seems to move from "we say we are sinless" to "we say we have not committed a single sin." Here is flat out denial of sin in one's life. It's not just ignoring it or pretending that it is unimportant. John targeted one branch of developing Gnosticism that overtly denied the presence of sin in the Christian's life.

The result of such denial? Two pairs of consequences are put forth by John. First, "we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." And secondly, "we make him a liar, and his word is not in us." Folks, this is serious business. To deny our sin is to deceive ourselves. We are living a delusion where reality does not

connect to assumption. We think we're good Christians, but we are even Christian at all. God's Truth has not impacted our life what so ever! Even worse our denial of personal sin slanders the God who has said you do have sin. We know more than God! What a farce! What arrogance! How deeply has ignorance of God and His Truth covered our eyes to reality. The Gnostics of John's day were living a lie, and were teaching it to others. And in the process they were slandering God who had declared the opposite of what they were saying. I would not want to be in their shoes on Judgement Day!

Do you know God? If you genuinely do, then you will be sensitive to the presence of sin in your life. What do you do about it, once you realize it's there in your life? John offers two correctives in these verses that are essential to a healthy spiritual life.

First, "If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." When we become aware of sin, we must 'confess it.' Now, folks, confession here is *ὁμολογῶμεν τὰς ἀμαρτίας ἡμῶν*. And confession here means public acknowledgement of our sins. No quick "I'm sorry, God," as we're going to bed at night will suffice. It's are more profound than this. No meeting a priest in a private booth in confession will be adequate. The Greek verb *ὁμολογέω* demands open, public confession of sins. In other words, we have to deal with our sins seriously and deeply.

When we're willing to do this, the promise of John is marvelous. God can be absolutely counted on to forgive and cleanse. God is both 'faithful and just' (*πιστός ἐστὶν καὶ δίκαιος*). The result of this character of God? He "will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." But His forgiveness and cleansing is dependent on our willingness to confess our sins as lined out here by John. Without confession, there is no forgiveness and cleansing.

Second, "we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world." Jesus stands before the Heavenly Father as our defense attorney, *οὐρ παράκλητον*. He pleads our case before the throne of God continually in seeking God's mercy toward us. But he does this out of having become our sacrifice, our *ἰλασμός*, through his death on the cross. This how His blood becomes the cleansing agent that God uses to get the sin out of our lives.

Thus, walking with God in His Light brings true fellowship. But our sinful nature is going to trip us up on occasion. And when it does, all isn't lost. Not at all! We turn to God in genuine confession. And through the work and advocacy of Jesus before the Father we find forgiveness and cleansing. Our fellowship with God deepens; holiness -- true holiness -- takes deep root in our lives and shapes who we are even more. Praise be to God!

III. Are you following the example of Jesus in obedience? 2:3-6

Next question: What about obedience to God? Notice what John says in verses three through six:

3 Now by this we may be sure that we know him, if we obey his commandments. 4 Whoever says, "I have come to know him," but does not obey his commandments, is a liar, and in such a person the truth does not exist; 5 but whoever obeys his word, truly in this person the love of God has reached perfection. By this we may be sure that we are in him: 6 whoever says, "I abide in him," ought to walk just as he walked.

How do we really know God? Any claim to knowing God has to be backed up with a lifestyle of obedience to God. John is crystal clear here. As was true in Jesus' teaching, so also among the apostles the Christian experience is not just a matter of getting rid of the bad. Equally, important is replacing the bad with the good. We must avoid doing wrong. But that's only half the job. "I don't drink, and I don't chew, and I don't go with the girls that do" is no Christian slogan.

What are filling your life with? John's point is that it must not be wrong, sinful things. But just as important, it is to be the good things of obedience to God's will. Again, John uses a series of 'what if' sentences to make his point, especially in condemning the Gnostic teachers for their false perspective.

If we obey, we know that we know God: *ἐν τούτῳ γινώσκομεν ὅτι ἐγνώκαμεν αὐτόν, ἐὰν τὰς ἐντολὰς αὐτοῦ τηρῶμεν*. To walk in God's Light simply means to consistently be doing what God tells us to do. And if we're unwilling to do this, quite simply we are "a liar, and in such a person the truth does not exist." John is abundantly clear on this point.

But when we live in obedience to God, what happens? Some wonderful things result. Central to this blessing is the blossoming of the love of God in our lives. What does that mean? In our minds we know that God loves us. The Bible makes that abundantly clear. But the love of God is a power spiritual dynamic, not just an attitude in God's heart. The ongoing challenge of our Christian life is to experience this transforming love of God personally. That means God comes into our lives as Love incarnate and this love begins permeating our total existence. Our thinking, our feeling, our commitments, our actions -- absolutely everything about us begins to be driven by the divine Love as the dominating force of our life. Our obedience to God is critical to freeing up this divine Love to take control of our existence. Obedience and love go together. Obedience

without love becomes Pharisaical religious legalism. Love without obedience becomes sloppy sentimentalism with no substance or structure.

The measure of obedience, John says, is the earthly Jesus. He perfectly combined obedience and love as He walked on planet earth. And thus He is the standard that we seek to emulate.

IV. Do you love others? 2:7-11

Out of question three comes question four: do you love the brethren? Note verses 7-11:

Beloved, I am writing you no new commandment, but an old commandment that you have had from the beginning; the old commandment is the word that you have heard. 8 Yet I am writing you a new commandment that is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining. 9 Whoever says, "I am in the light," while hating a brother or sister, is still in the darkness. 10 Whoever loves a brother or sister lives in the light, and in such a person there is no cause for stumbling. 11 But whoever hates another believer is in the darkness, walks in the darkness, and does not know the way to go, because the darkness has brought on blindness.

Do you know God? If you do, then you will love God's people. It's that simple. There is nothing new or trivial about this. This principle is basic and has been around a long, long time. Yet, in some ways it's new since many have forgotten it. Loving God meant loving God's people all through the Old Testament. But with the coming of Jesus, this principle took on new, refreshing tones and implications.

John is quite blunt about this. If you claim to be in God's light, you absolutely cannot be condemning and slicing up God's people in anger and hate. If you spend your time criticizing the church, the people of God in the church etc., John is quite frank: there is no way under Heaven that you are a Christian with such an attitude and action. Notice the emphatic way John puts this: "whoever hates another believer is in the darkness, walks in the darkness, and does not know the way to go, because the darkness has brought on blindness." It was no accident that John made this point after the one on the love of God. When God's love saturates your life, hate and negativism toward God's people has no place to lodge in your heart and attitudes.

Do you genuinely know God? How you treat fellow believers largely determines the answer to that question.

V. Do you despise worldly things? 2:12-17

Final, question: how do you feel about things? In vv. 12-17, and especially vv. 15-17, John makes an important point:

12 I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven on account of his name. 13 I am writing to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I am writing to you, young people, because you have conquered the evil one. 14 I write to you, children, because you know the Father. I write to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young people, because you are strong and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one. 15 Do not love the world or the things in the world. The love of the Father is not in those who love the world; 16 for all that is in the world—the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, the pride in riches—comes not from the Father but from the world. 17 And the world and its desire are passing away, but those who do the will of God live forever.

John begins this section with a poetic affirmation of his readers in the apostolic tradition.

2:12 Γράφω ὑμῖν, τέκνια,
ὅτι ἀφέωνται ὑμῖν αἱ ἁμαρτίαι διὰ τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ.
2:13 γράφω ὑμῖν, πατέρες,
ὅτι ἐγνώκατε τὸν ἀπ' ἀρχῆς.
γράφω ὑμῖν, νεανίσκοι,
ὅτι νενικήκατε τὸν πονηρόν.
2:14 ἔγραψα ὑμῖν, παιδιά,
ὅτι ἐγνώκατε τὸν πατέρα.
ἔγραψα ὑμῖν, πατέρες,
ὅτι ἐγνώκατε τὸν ἀπ' ἀρχῆς.
ἔγραψα ὑμῖν, νεανίσκοι,
ὅτι ἰσχυροὶ ἐστε
καὶ ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν ὑμῖν μένει
καὶ νενικήκατε τὸν πονηρόν.

12 I am writing to you, little children,
because your sins are forgiven on account of his
name.
13 I am writing to you, fathers,
because you know him who is from the beginning.
I am writing to you, young people,
because you have conquered the evil one.
14 I write to you, children,
because you know the Father.
I write to you, fathers,
because you know him who is from the beginning.
I write to you, young people,
because you are strong
and the word of God abides in you,
and you have overcome the evil one.

He had fundamental confidence in the fidelity of the bulk of the church members he was writing to, but none in the false teachers who were spreading their religious poison among these church members.

His final point comes in verses 15-17: "15 Do not love the world or the things in the world. The love of the Father is not in those who love the world; 16 for all that is in the world—the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, the pride in riches — comes not from the Father but from the world. 17 And the world and its desire are passing away, but those who do the will of God live forever."

He begins with an admonition to stop loving the world and worldly things. You cannot genuinely know God and be a slave to things? The ways of the world and the ways of God are diametrically opposed to one another. You have to choose between them; you can't have both. Worldly ways are sources of pride and arrogance, John declares. And both they and the world along with them are vanishing. They will not last but will suffer eventual destruction. Thus, you have hitched your wagon to a horse that will lead you straight into the destruction of Hell itself.

Things are hard to turn loose of. I know by personal experience. When Claire and I made the decision to move from North Carolina to Germany last summer, it quickly began dawning on us that we would have to turn loose of the vast majority of things that we had worked hard to accumulate over several years of marriage. Our nice home and a ton of furnishings could not be moved to Germany. For me one of the hardest things was a four thousand volume personal library that had been carefully developed over forty plus years of ministry. I also had to turn loose of a shop loaded with power tools for wood working that I had assembled in anticipation of retirement years. We struggled a lot all last fall as we sold at dirt cheap prices, gave away to family, donated to charity close to 90% of our belongings in order to make the move here. Yet, in the midst of all of this came a wonderful feeling of liberation. We were now far less attached to and dependent on things. For people living in western society this is not a common feeling or experience. We crave our things. But in the end, our things end up owning us and we become their slaves.

John knew this quite well. Knowing God means turning loose of things, and putting God authentically in first place in our lives. The Gnostic teachers had contended that things were evil, but since evil no longer mattered it was okay to indulge in things. Worldliness was okay, because it couldn't harm your soul. Think most modern day TV preachers, if you want to see an contemporary 'Gnostic' false teacher. While claiming superior spirituality the vast majority of them live as slaves to a crass materialism in a lifestyle of luxury and worldliness. John's assessment: these people wouldn't recognize God if they saw Him on the street corner. They haven't a clue about who He actually is.

CONCLUSION

So I come back to the original question. Now that we've gone through the subsidiary questions, you're in a better position to answer the basic one.

DO YOU GENUINELY KNOW GOD? I pray that you do. You can know that you know Him only as you're walking in the Light along side Jesus.