

WORDS VERSUS DEEDS

One does not know God who does not conform to His will. We may believe intellectually that there is a God; we may affirm the truth of His existence, the facts of His attributes, the reality of His works in nature. But only those who have wholly committed their wills to His know Him in His saving power. "And this is life eternal, that they should know thee the only true God, and him whom thou didst send, even Jesus Christ" (John 17:3). If it be asked which commandments constitute the test here submitted, the answer is, All of them! Any commandment we are disposed to break because of our unwillingness to bend our wills to His provides the occasion which demonstrates lack of full knowledge of Him. This is the "one thing" which we "lack" and which, like the young ruler's riches, will close the door of Heaven in our faces.

The Gnostics boasted of their superior knowledge and spiritual insight and maintained their acquaintance with the Lord despite the fact that they kept not His commandments. With reference to all such, the apostle solemnly declares, "He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (1 John 2:4). The verbs in the Greek text are in the present tense. He who **keeps on** saying, I know Him, and yet **keeps on** not keeping His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. Far from actually and really knowing God, those who refuse to do His will are, in addition to being disobedient characters, liars, and without truth.

The words, *he is a liar*, are more emphatic than *we lie*, of 1 John 1:6, and *we deceive ourselves*, of v. 8. His status is not simply that of one who is guilty of a single falsehood, or one who is innocently deceived; his acts of falsehood have become embedded in his character and he is, essentially, a liar. Such a one is demonstrating the nature and character of his father, the devil, who is a liar from the beginning (John 8:44). It was evidently no uncommon thing at the time John wrote for men (who had adopted the pernicious doctrine of the Gnostics) to affirm that they, though willfully guilty of sinful acts, were not thereby corrupted. Some of these men maintained that they were no more polluted by sin than gold is by the mire into which it might fall.

As shocking as the foregoing theology is, it has its modern counterparts. Those false teachers, while denying any contamination from sin, did admit the fact of sin in their lives. There are those today who deny both the sin and the contamination. A prominent denominational preacher, in a tract titled, *Do a Christian's Sins Damn His Soul?* wrote:

We take the position that a Christian's sins do not damn his soul. The way a Christian lives, what he says, his character, his conduct, or his attitude toward other people have nothing whatever to do with the salvation of his soul.... All the prayers a man may pray, all the Bibles he may read, all the churches he may belong to, all the services he may attend, all the sermons he may practice, all the debts he may pay, all the ordinances he may observe, all the laws he may keep, all the benevolent acts he may perform will not make his soul one whit safer; and all the sins he may commit from idolatry to murder will not make his soul in any more danger.... The way a man lives has nothing whatsoever to do with the salvation of his soul.

Such theology, whether ancient or modern, is precisely in principle what John condemned when he affirmed that those who say they know Him, yet do not keep His commandments, are liars.

—Guy N. Woods
Deceased