

1 John 2:21

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth,
but because ye know it, and that no lie is of the truth.

Analysis

I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it, and that no lie is of the truth. John clarifies his motivation for writing. "I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth" (ouk egrapsa hymin hoti ouk oidate tēn alētheian)—John doesn't write as if addressing ignorant people needing basic instruction. He assumes his readers possess fundamental knowledge of gospel truth through the Spirit's anointing (verse 20). This isn't condescension but affirmation of their spiritual state.

"But because ye know it" (all' hoti oidate autēn)—John writes precisely because they do know the truth. His letter reinforces and confirms what they already know, helping them recognize error by reminding them of truth. This is pastoral ministry: not constant novelty but faithful reiteration of apostolic gospel, strengthening believers' grasp of essential truth they already possess through the Spirit's teaching.

"And that no lie is of the truth" (kai hoti pan pseudos ek tēs alētheias ouk estin)—this categorical statement establishes truth's exclusive nature. "No lie" (pan pseudos, every lie) and "the truth" are mutually exclusive categories with different origins. Truth comes from God; lies from the father of lies (John 8:44). Believers who know the truth through the Spirit can recognize lies by their incompatibility with revealed truth. The antichrists' denials of Christ (verse 22) are lies, demonstrably incompatible with the truth believers already know.

Historical Context

Paul similarly affirmed believers' knowledge while continuing to teach them (Romans 15:14, 1 Thessalonians 4:9). This wasn't flattery but recognition that the Spirit teaches all believers essential truths. Yet even Spirit-taught believers benefit from apostolic teaching reinforcing and clarifying truth. The Bereans, though commended for examining Paul's teaching against Scripture (Acts 17:11), still needed Paul's instruction.

In John's context, false teachers implied ordinary believers lacked true knowledge, needing the Gnostics' superior revelation. John counters: believers already know truth through the Spirit; the Gnostic teaching is the lie, contradicting truth believers possess. This empowered ordinary Christians to reject sophisticated-sounding error based on the Spirit's internal witness to truth.

The Reformation principle of *testimonium Spiritus Sancti internum* (internal testimony of the Holy Spirit) developed from passages like this. The Spirit witnesses to Scripture's truth in believers' hearts, providing conviction that goes beyond rational argumentation. Calvin taught that while external evidences support Scripture's authority, the Spirit's internal witness provides ultimate certainty. Believers know truth not merely intellectually but spiritually, through the Spirit's anointing.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. How does knowing you already possess essential truth through the Spirit affect your response to new teachings claiming secret knowledge?
2. What role does faithful repetition and reinforcement of known truth play in your spiritual growth and resistance to error?

3. How can you develop greater confidence in discerning lies by their incompatibility with truth you know through the Spirit?

Interlinear Text

οὐκ	ἔγραψα	ὑμῖν	ὅτι	οὐκ	οἴδατε	τὴν	ἀληθείας	
not	I have	unto you	because	not	ye know	G3588	the truth	
G3756	G1125	G5213	G3754	G3756	G1492		G225	
ἀλλ'	ὅτι	οἴδατε	αὐτήν,	καὶ	ὅτι	πᾶν	ψεῦδος	ἐκ
but	because	ye know	it	and	because	no	lie	of
G235	G3754	G1492	G846	G2532	G3754	G3956	G5579	G1537
τῆς	ἀληθείας	οὐκ	ἔστιν					
G3588	the truth	not	is					
	G225	G3756	G2076					

Additional Cross-References

2 Peter 1:12 (Truth): Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth.

Jude 1:5 (Parallel theme): I will therefore put you in remembrance, though ye once knew this, how that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed them that believed not.

Proverbs 1:5 (Parallel theme): A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels: