

An Unchanging Message in the Midst of Postcolonial Revision

Max Fernandez / General

Certainty: Absolute Truths that Produce Joyful Assurance / Truth; Certainty; Assurance / 1
John 1:5–10

› Kids' Pause: Who God is has never changed.

Our security is attached to what we believe to be true. If we believe that ultimate security is attached to education, money, or happiness, then any time our belief about those things is shaken, we become insecure.

In some cases, our identity is attached to our past — to our history. For some, this is a good thing. For others, a history that is not so flattering can be a bad thing. In many ways, we see our past as that which defines who we are.

“The Biden Team will put racial justice and equity at the center of our agenda.” - Susan Rice, WH domestic policy advisor¹

“Why can't we just go back to the good ole' day? - Grace Baptist Church member

In Cary Schmidt's new book *Stop Trying: How to Receive—Not Achieve—Your Real Identity*, he lists sixteen identity factors which he says our world imposes upon us in order to form our identity (who we are in our deepest sense). Three of them are worth our consideration today:²

- Race/Ethnicity/Culture - *I am my ethnicity or culture.*
- Family of Origin - *I am my familial heritage.*
- Past Abuse/Victimization - *I am my bruises.*

With each of these, there is a story that goes along in order to define who we are. What happens when these stories are either changed or these stories become points of shame rather than points of pride? Revision.

¹ <https://www.foxnews.com/politics/biden-to-sign-17-executive-actions-on-first-day-in-office-reversing-trump-policies-restoring-obama-programs>

² Schmidt, Cary. *Stop Trying: How to Receive—Not Achieve—Your Real Identity* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2021), 37-38.

In fact, this is one of the ways that Critical Theory has dealt with Colonialism. Edward Said is identified as the “founding father of postcolonial Theory” (52) by Pluckrose and Lindsay.³ As a reminder, Theory is a set of beliefs that “the world and our ability to gather knowledge about it” (47) works on some assumptions: objective reality cannot be known, and society is composed of systems of power and hierarchies, which decide what can be known and how (Pluckrose & Lindsay, 35).

This set of beliefs evolved into applications (ways to apply the beliefs), which have been loosely called “Social Justice scholarship:” “New forms (branches) of Theory arose within postcolonialism” (47). For sake of understanding, we will simply identify this as one branch of applying Critical Theory. If a wheel hub is *Critical Theory*, then postcolonialism will be one of the spokes on the wheel.

In order to understand **postcolonialism**, we need to understand what is meant by colonialism. Colonialism is *the policy or practice of acquiring full or partial political control over another country, occupying it with settlers, and exploiting it economically*. It is a history that is viewed negatively today. You may better understand words like colonies or colonizing. This is largely viewed as negative because it is seen as people with means/wealth/power taking over others. Because this practical of history is viewed negatively, “... postcolonial Theory came about to achieve a specific purpose, *decolonization*: the systematic undoing of colonialism in all its manifestations and impacts” (67). **Part of this purpose includes the revising and rewriting of history.** For example, Pluckrose and Lindsay explain the context of Said’s book *Orientalism* and his approach:

Edward Said, the founding father of postcolonial Theory, drew heavily on Michel Foucault (French), and his work therefore focused on how discourses construct reality. For Said, it was not enough to simply deconstruct power structures and show how perceptions of the East had been constructed by the West. It was necessary to revise and rewrite history. He argues that “history is made by men and women, just as it can also be unmade and rewritten....” (52).

³ Pluckrose, Helen & Lindsay, James. *Cynical Theories: How Activist Scholarship Made Everything about Race, Gender, and Identity* (Durham: Pitchstone Publishing, 2020).

Imagine that 100 years from now the history books that teach US history will be completely different from what you have known. For some of us, this is tremendously unsettling. When history is rewritten, when words are changed, when philosophies evolve...is there anything in which we can find assurance? Yes, there is a message that cannot be revised. [1 John 1:5](#) confirms what this message is:

1 John 1:5 KJV 1900

⁵ This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

- › Kids: Mankind can rewrite stories of history, but they cannot change who God is.

The message that has been declared is unchanging and presents the eternal truth of God — a truth that cannot be changed. It is a truth that has stood the test of all of human history, especially the test of the last 2,000 years of human history. If we will have confidence of our salvation, of eternal life, it will be connected to this message — *God is light, and in him is no darkness at all*. We should examine this verse, because the truth of this is fundamental to the rest of the letter of I John. Do you know God according to how Jesus has revealed him? A departure from any part of this truth will leave you lacking confident assurance.

(1) Who gave this message?

1 John 1:1 KJV 1900

¹ THAT which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life;

1 John 1:5 KJV 1900

⁵ This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

The Message

This then is the message which we have heard of him — it is important to note that this message came from the “Word of Life.” The term for Word here is the *logos*, and culturally this term meant the logic or reason for life. Scripturally, the

term is associated with God's power in creation and justice. The use of *logos* in this passage is to confirm that God has come in body fully. **It is this Person who has declared the message**, but how has this message been declared? Jesus himself, as the *logos*, is the message, and He has declared the message. Read carefully the words of Jesus in [John 8:12](#):

John 8:12 KJV 1900

¹² Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.

In this one verse, Jesus says, "I am..." which is a claim to be God because that is God's name from the Old Testament. In addition, Jesus says, "I am the light..." Jesus, in his own person, is the message and says the message with his words. Do you understand that you cannot know God apart from Jesus Christ?

- › Kids: Jesus is the message from God, and Jesus spoke the message about God. Get to know Jesus in order to know God.

The Authority of the Message

Because Jesus is both the message and the Giver of the message, the authority of the message is settled. No one has the right to change the message. Any declaration that manipulates, takes away, or changes this declaration of Jesus leads to lack of assurance, a distorted understanding of God, a lack of confident joy. You cannot have assurance of eternal life apart from an increasingly clear view of God.

What kinds of declarations assume an authority that is not theirs by manipulating, taking away, or changing what Jesus has declared in His Person?

(a.1) Organized religious authorities

There are those extremists who call many things light/darkness, which God does not call light/darkness. These are individuals who are religious, and they use terms like *light* and *darkness* to mean whatever they like or don't like. In recent days, these people have used these terms politically to justify their own party platform or to denigrate the opposing political platform. Sometimes, religious authorities use terms like *light* and *darkness* to mean a certain kind of worship preference or clothing

style. These are manipulations of the truth that *God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.*

Then there are those extremists who do NOT explicitly call light/darkness what God does call light/darkness. These are those who do not stand against any kind of sin that is explicitly called sin in the scriptures. These are those who do not see hatred of heart, covetousness, idolatry, or any such like as sinful. These are those who change the word of God to accommodate for ongoing immoral fornication or same-sex activity. These are manipulations of the truth that *God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.* Often, these are found in organized religion.

(a.2) Organized secular religious authorities

This would be any call to faith/belief in scholarship that makes mankind (experience) as ultimate authority. Under the heading “Applying the Inapplicable,” Pluckrose and Lindsay explain:

For the activist-scholars of the 1980s, the suffering associated with oppression implied the existence of something that could suffer and a mechanism by which that suffering can occur. “I think, therefore I am” (Rene Descartes-French mathematician, scientist, and philosopher from 1600’s) was given new life under the axiomatic acceptance of new existential bedrock: “I experience oppression, therefore I am...and so are dominance and oppression.” (51)

We must remember though that as fallen creatures, even the way we experience life is fallen. Our perceptions are fallen. Consider even one of the experiences of tastelessness from Covid or an addict who experiences hallucinations. The problem though that we have is far greater than COVID — it is sin. Sin dulls our most important faculties, because it renders us dead.

Man is not light. Man’s experience is NOT light. Man is not the standard for determining good/bad, right/wrong. When man’s experience is made to be the standard, there is no confident assurance.

› Kids: Man is not God.

(2) What is our responsibility with the message?

1 John 1:5 KJV 1900

⁵ This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

The responsibility is two-fold. Notice *we have heard of him, and declare*.

John is a recipient of the message, and we must see how we are recipients of the message. The fact that we are recipients shows our need. Something that we did NOT have has been handed to us. It is good to be humbled by the truth that we are needy recipients of this message.

Secondly, John is a conduit of the message. The word *declare* is a term that has been used earlier in the passage to mean that he is a *messenger*. This message makes the recipients of this message to be messengers.

- › Kids: Our responsibility is to receive the message and to declare the message. We are messengers. “*God is light and in him is no darkness at all.*”

In baseball practice, we had a particular drill to help strengthen receiving the baseball and passing it off quickly. We lined up three players in a straight line about 60 feet apart from each other. One player began the circuit. Player one would pass the ball to the middle player, who received and quickly passed the ball to the final player, who then received, did a 360 degree turn and passed the ball back to the middle player, who received and passed back to player one.

In like manner, the message of *God is light, and in him is no darkness at all* is a message that is to be received and passed along. **There is one important distinction that we should make here though.** The message is for the lost, but it is not only for the lost. For example, listen to these words of Paul:

2 Corinthians 4:3-4 KJV 1900

³ But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: ⁴ In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.

We want the lost to receive the light of the gospel, but here in our passage, John is telling this message to Christians. The message that *God is light, and in him is no darkness at all* is a message that is for the assurance of believers. It is

a message to reorient believers who have been shaken or disturbed. This message is the truth claim against which all other claims will be measured. This message will be what establishes security and confidence for the Christians.

I remember getting lost in the woods in the dark. Though I had marked my path with small orange strips of tape, I had lost my way deep into the woods. Finally, I just sat down in the dark by a tree and began thinking about what to do. After a few moments, I decided to go back to the beginning — to the first piece of tape. If I could find the starting point, then that would lead me to the second and to the third, and then I would get to my destination. The first piece of tape was the place to get reoriented in the right direction, to find the security of knowing that I was on the right path.

This fundamental message about God is like that first piece of tape. It is the message that would guide the rest of the journey for these Christians. When wrong teachings would come, they needed to hear this first message: *God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.*

- › Kids' Pause: Children, knowing who God is is the most important knowledge you can have.

(3) What is the complete message and its meaning?

1 John 1:5 KJV 1900

⁵ This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

God is light is a way to comprehensively describe the being of God.

Self-revelation as:

- Light as Righteousness - [Isaiah 5:20](#)
- Light as Guiding Word - [Psalm 119:105](#)
- Light as revelation of Truth - [John 1:4-5](#)
- Light as good, morally pure - [John 3:19-21](#)

What does this all mean about God? *God is Light* means that he is perfectly **righteous** (*never gets judgment wrong, always perfect in justice*), he is perfect **Truth** (*anything that does not confirm to his nature is falsehood*), he is perfectly

moral (*perfect in love and care for his own creatures and his own Person*). *God is Light* is perfectly manifested in Jesus Christ (showing that there is a way to concretely know/experience all that God is). Because God is light, *in him there is no darkness*. He has no sin, and He is morally perfect in every way. Knowing that *God is Light* is necessary because it makes us to realize the kind of Savior we need.

› **Kids: God is perfect in every way.**

Conclusion:

If God is not completely perfect, then we really don't need a Savior who is perfect; but if God is *Light*, then men in darkness cannot save us. We are guilty before this perfect God. If God is Light, then *neither rewriting history, Critical Theory, Postcolonialism, religious conservatism, nor religious liberalism* can save us before this God.

The only deliverance from these devastating extremes is the light of the gospel of Jesus Christ. In Christ, we are presented with a clear picture of God, a clear picture of our utter sinfulness, an unmerited means for forgiveness, and a way in which life can be increasingly lived according to TRUE knowledge in Christ (anointing).

Nearly no one that I have read who is secular denies the fact that Jesus was a good man. It is continuously affirmed. But what exactly do these affirmations show us? That Jesus existed in a way that appears to be distinct, and the way that something inside of us confirms the way life was supposed to be lived. The question is not are you as good as everyone else, but are you as good as Jesus? Jesus is the standard of light, goodness, righteousness, and moral perfection. Will you come to Jesus today?

Husbands, do you want increasing security in your marriage? You must begin with Who God is and be shaped by the One who declared Him. Wives, do you realize that your security is not in the knowledge that gossip can provide for you? Security begins with Who God is. Children, did you know that growing in the knowledge of Jesus is the greatest exercise you can participate in for security? Senior Saints, to what or to whom have you attached your confidence?

Postcolonialism teaches that changing written history is the answer, **but John says that the unchanging history of God is the answer.** Postmodernism teaches that objective truth is unattainable, **but John says objectively that *God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.*** Postmodernism applied makes man's experience to be the baseline for truth, **but John makes God to be the Standard for Truth.**

God is light, and in him is no darkness at all is the unchanging message in the midst of Postcolonial revision.