

THE PALMETTO REMINDER

“stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder” (2 Peter 3.1)

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“... and all liars”

(Revelation 21:8)

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The book of Revelation mentions liars in 14:5 and again in 21:8. As John describes the 144,000 – which is a symbol of God’s people – he says *“no lie was found in their mouth.”* Then, in describing hell, John says *“But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.”*

Why did the Lord single out lying? We might suppose that it is on the list because it is, after all, a sinful thing. God hates lying and deceit (Prov 12:22). Deceit is the way of Satan (recall John 8:44), it is one of the qualities of wicked and foolish people, and it is worldly. But so are all kinds of other things. So why does lying make it onto the list in Revelation 21, and not things like malice, or homosexuality, or arrogance? Those things are sinful too.

If you will recall, the book of Revelation is about how Satan was going to use the Roman empire and its imperial cult (“emperor worship”) to persecute Christians. John depicts a cosmic battle between two kingdoms: the kingdom of Jesus, and the kingdom of Satan. Both wish to rule over the lives of men, and

both claim the earth as their territory. But there is only room in the universe for one of them. John wrote the book of Revelation to assure the Christians that Jesus would defeat Satan and his ally, Rome, and that faithful Christians would be delivered safely to glory even if they were killed by the enemy.

John wrote of a war that had just only begun and would intensify. He wrote about a *“great tribulation”* (7:14) that was coming on the Christians and that would *“soon take place”* (Rev 1:1) – within a generation or so of their own times. When the time of persecution came, it would challenge the faithfulness of many. Christians would fear for their lives, and some of them would be killed. In such difficult times, there are always those who would wish to save their lives by denying who they are, that is, by denying their relationship with Jesus. Like Peter, many would be tempted to dissociate themselves from Jesus to save their necks. This is the very thing that happened in Asia Minor in the days right after John wrote Revelation. A Roman governor in the northern part of Asia Minor wrote a letter to the emperor Trajan about twenty years after John wrote Revelation. The subject of the letter was to ask the emperor

if he was conducting the trials of Christians properly. As he describes the procedure he had been using, he relates:

I interrogated them whether they were Christians; if they confessed it I repeated the question twice again, adding the threat of capital punishment; if they still persevered, I ordered them to be executed. ... Those who denied they were, or had ever been, Christians, who repeated after me an invocation to the gods, and offered adoration, with wine and frankincense, to your image, which I had ordered to be brought for that purpose, together with those of the gods, and who finally cursed Christ – none of which acts, it is said, those who are really Christians can be forced into performing – these I thought it proper to discharge. Others who were named by the informer at first confessed themselves to be Christians, and then denied it; true, they had been of that persuasion but they had quit it, some three years, others many years, and a few as much as twenty-five years ago.

They all worshipped your statue and the images of the gods, and cursed Christ. (Pliny's Letter #96)

Notice those who “confessed themselves to be Christians and then denied it.” These, I think, are the liars Jesus was warning about in the book of Revelation. It was Christians who lied about their relationship with Jesus because they were afraid for their lives in times of persecution.

John wanted his readers to understand that their victory over the enemy would not come by lying about who they were, but by confessing their relationship with Jesus even if it meant their deaths. Elsewhere John describes Christians as those who “*overcame him [Satan] because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even when faced with death*” (12:11). It is their faithfulness and their willingness to be counted as followers of Jesus that would secure them the victory. In a world that is still hostile to God, Jesus, and the people of Jesus, God expects no less of us. ✍