

False Teaching Then and Now

Lesson #2 Gnosticism ³²²²

Supplemental Attachments for This Lesson:

File #1945 Title: How “Evangelical” is the Evangelical Movement?

I. What is Gnosticism?

An ancient Greek philosophical system that over the years has been infused into a number of religions including Christianity, becoming a heretical Christian sect or set of beliefs.

- Understanding of dualism (the material world is evil, the spiritual world is good)
- God is too far above mankind to have any direct relationship with material men.
- A set of beliefs tied to paganism, Oriental mysticism, and occultism (astrology and magic).
- God has a feminine side and is recognized by Mother-Father.
- The main thrust is that salvation from the evil of the world is to possess secret, inner knowledge.
- There are a series of gods (divine emanations) of which Jesus and Sophia (wisdom) are two.
- Jesus is a product of Sophia and the Supreme Being and is called an aeon (a type of divine emanation).
- Sophia alone produced the Demiurge (the OT Yahweh).

Greek: *to know γινωσκω ginowsko* (Str. 1097) 222x in NT. Means to know, understand, recognize.

Jesus uses the word to imply an intimate relationship with another such as to know the Father involves a love as in a faithful son being obedient to the Father. Mounce’s Complete Expository Dictionary; p. 382

In ancient Greece and even in New Testament times, Gnosticism was a esoteric, mystical belief system that was not particularly Christian, but by the latter first century and after there were sects of “Christian Gnostics” which were considered heretical in their beliefs. Since one of Gnosticism’s beliefs is the dualism of the world. That which is of material cannot be spiritual and is always marred by evil. That which is of the spiritual nature can never be part of the world’s material makeup. Therefore Gnostics believed Jesus was not born of the flesh, but only appeared that he was.

Two NT passages that seems to be directed towards denying these Gnostic beliefs are:

1 Jn 1:1-4 *What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life — ²and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us — ³what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. ⁴These things we write, so that our joy may be made complete.*

Note: All Scripture Passages in this series will be from the NASU unless otherwise indicated.

1 Jn 4:1-4 *Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. ²By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; ³and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world. ⁴You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world.*

II. Gnosticism Then: Late 1st AD through 2nd Century AD.

A. Relevant Promoter(s) of Heresy – Simon Magus (Acts 8:9-24)

“Simon Magus (Greek Σίμων ὁ μάγος, Latin: Simon Magus), also known as **Simon the Sorcerer** or **Simon the Magician**, was a religious figure whose confrontation with Peter is recorded

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in Acts 8:9–24. The **act of simony**, or paying for position, is named after Simon who tried to buy his way into the power of the Apostles.

According to Acts, Simon was a Samaritan magus or religious figure of the 1st century AD and a convert to Christianity, baptised by Philip the Evangelist. Simon later clashed with Peter. Accounts of Simon by writers of the second century exist, but are not considered verifiable.^{[1][2]} Surviving traditions about Simon appear in orthodox texts, such as those of Irenaeus, Justin Martyr, Hippolytus, and Epiphanius, where he is often described as the founder of Gnosticism,^{[3][4][5][6]} which has been accepted by some modern scholars,^{[7][8]} while others reject that he was a Gnostic, just designated as one by the Church Fathers.^{[9][10]}” **From Wikipedia – Simon Magus – Introductory paragraphs**

B. Important Christian Apologists Against Gnosticism:

“**Justin Martyr** (c. 100/114 – c. 162/168) wrote the **First Apology**, addressed to Roman emperor Antoninus Pius, which criticised Simon Magus, Menander and Marcion. Since then, both Simon and Menander have been considered as 'proto-Gnostic'.^[185]

Irenaeus (died c. 202) wrote **Against Heresies** (c. 180–185), which identifies Simon Magus from Flavia Neapolis in Samaria as the inceptor of Gnosticism. From Samaria he charted an apparent spread of the teachings of Simon through the ancient "knowers" into the teachings of Valentinus and other, contemporary Gnostic sects.^[note 30]

Hippolytus (170–235) wrote the ten-volume **Refutation Against all Heresies**, of which eight have been unearthed. It also focuses on the connection between pre-Socratic (and therefore Pre-Incantation of Christ) ideas and the false beliefs of early gnostic heretical leaders. Thirty-three of the groups he reported on are considered Gnostic by modern scholars, including 'the foreigners' and 'the Seth people'. Hippolytus further presents individual teachers such as Simon, Valentinus, Secundus, Ptolemy, Heracleon, Marcus, Colorbasus.

Tertullian (c. 155–230) from Carthage wrote **Adversus Valentinianos** ('Against the Valentinians'), c. 206, as well as five books around 207–208 chronicling and refuting the teachings of Marcion.”

From Wikipedia – Gnosticism – Heresiologists

C. The Nag Hammadi Codicils: In 1945 an Egyptian peasant boy came upon a large clay jar that contained about a dozen writings in the form of parchment paper in leatherbound book form. These made their way to sellers of antiquities and eventually to western scholars. These were Gnostic writings from the early centuries of the Christian church. They are sometimes referred to as the lost gospels. (e.g. *The Gospel of Thomas*, *The Apocalypse of John*, etc.) Encyclopedia of Heresies and Heretics; p. 101.

D. Significant Other Gnostic Sects Include:

Docetism: Christ could not have become wicked flesh, therefore, He only appeared as a physical man.

Marcionism: Dualism – the Old Testament God Yahweh is not the same as the New Testament God who was a God of love and mercy rather than a God exclusively of wrath.

Manichaeism: A 3rd century version of Dualistic Gnosticism propounded by Mani (216-276) that spread to the orient, into modern day Turkey and in certain western European countries.

III. Gnosticism Now (21st Century)

A. Elements of Gnosticism Still Challenging Our Churches Today:

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- **New Age** – Belief in the inherent divinity of all humans. Emphasizes the need to acquire secret, higher order knowledge through self insight rather than through Revelation of Scripture.
- **Postmodernism** – the surrender of Christian and modernist understanding that truth reflects a single objective reality. Today the concept that there is no objective truth to the cosmos and that it is arrogant to believe in any source of objective truth. There is only your truth versus my truth.
- **Christian Science** – has philosophical roots in Gnostic ideas. Thus the denial of Christian orthodox thought is largely complete and has nothing to do with God or Christ, nor with the early church. Christian Science has nothing to do with science. It is all based on the wandering thoughts regarding personal experience of a life of suffering and dissatisfaction.
- **Theosophy** – a pantheistic form of Gnosticism focused largely on secret knowledge from Astrology. Astrology is the determination of human destiny and events based on the supposed connection between humans and the cosmos which is believed by some to routinely affects our destinies. (Astronomy is the observation of the cosmos regarding its observable nature.)

“A primary idea is the essential oneness of all beings. Life is everywhere throughout the cosmos because all originates from the same unknowable divine source. Consequently, everything from the subatomic to plants, animals, humans, planets, stars, and galaxies is alive and evolving. Each is divine at its root and expresses itself through spiritual, intellectual, psychological, ethereal, and material ranges of consciousness and substance.” **Walter Martin**; *The Kingdom of the Cults*; p. 281

- **Jehovah's Witnesses** – have unique secret knowledge; deny deity of Christ; deny the Trinity; the only true followers of Jehovah; only 144,000 will ever go to heaven; the Church age is over; this is now the Kingdom age.
- **Liberal Theology** - in most forms. A denial of Christian orthodoxy based on the wisdom of humanism and a denial of the inerrancy and the inspiration of Scripture. It also limits God's ability to manage His own creation and makes God subject to the laws of nature (science) which He created. Thus there can be no actual miracles. Their God is way too small!
- **Secularism** – The treatment of Scripture and theology as just the superstitions of an uneducated people still stuck in Medieval thought processes. Secularism (humanism) is largely identical in principle with Liberal Theology, but makes no pretense regarding a higher power (Creator God).

B. General Gnostic “wisdom” invading Our Evangelical Churches: Without being a part of one of the specific religious/philosophical institutions listed above, nevertheless, Gnostic ideas are all around us and in many of our churches in as much as these ideas have become common knowledge/belief throughout our culture. These common ideas are accepted as true and yet have no proof or evidence.

Examples of such common false ideas are:

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- If it is an ancient idea, it must be very wise and likely true. **False!**
- The common material things of life are not holy or less holy than the things that we do not see. **False!** This is part of the Gnostic dualism which is a serious error.
- The nature of spiritual things goes beyond our ability to comprehend. **False!** Nevertheless, we err when we go beyond what has been clearly revealed to us by God, since we cannot comprehend these spiritual truth without revelation. **False!** Our wisdom is insufficient to understand that which has not been authoritatively revealed to us.
- The God of the Old Testament is either a different God or is clearly a different manifestation of God from that of the New Testament. **False!**
- There is secret wisdom and/or knowledge available to spiritual gurus or scholars that is not available to the average laymen. We should seek such deeper knowledge to supplement or clarify what God has revealed to us. **False!**
- Asceticism is an important/required path to knowledge of the holy. **False!**

Important Quotations

Throughout history, our enemy has raised up many false prophets and false teachers, but perhaps never before in history has the church itself raised up so many of its own false teachers, parading them and welcoming them into their homes and churches. False teachers abound on many of the so-called Christian television networks, and books by false teachers fill the shelves of many so-called Christian bookstores. And while many Christians are rightly concerned about the growth of religions such as Islam, the greatest threat to orthodox Christianity is not other religions but false teachers who creep into the church unnoticed.

Burk Parsons; *TableTalk of April/2018;* p. 2

Gnosticism identified God with the inner self, but Christianity has focused all of its resources on God outside of us, who creates, rules, judges, and saves us in our complete personal and corporate existence. It stands to reason that in the Gnostic scheme the inner self could stand above (even over against) not only the external church but its external ministry of preaching and sacraments, discipline and order, catchesis and communion. After all, it is not the public, historical, visible, and messy world that concerns Gnostics but the private, spiritual, invisible, and manageable world of the inner spirit.

Michael Horton; *Christless Christianity;* p. 186

Religion is just another way of turning our native awareness of God into our own attempts to take heaven by storm and bring it under our control. Pelagianism does this by practical works, and Gnosticism ascends the ladder of mystical spirituality. No longer a sovereign God who reigns over us and is completely different from us, the God of Gnosticism is always friendly and familiar precisely because our own inner self is itself divine.

Michael Horton; *Christless Christianity;* p. 165

Forged in great upheavals and doctrinal controversy, the early creeds forced the church to carefully define the doctrines of the Trinity and the person of Christ. Today, most of the cults and sects that have arisen are champions of the "no creed but Christ" maxim - and with good reason. We have covered this ground before in the controversies of the past: the Mormons are Gnostics; the Jehovah's Witnesses are Arians; and so on. Why should we ignore the successes of the church in the past when facing the same heresies again and again in church history? **Michael Horton;** edited by John H. Armstrong *The Coming Evangelical Crisis;* p. 249