

# Gnosticism in the Greater Church of God Today

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After Christ's death and resurrection which we were reminded of during the spring holy days, after His death and resurrection, Satan's mission was to find a way to change the true teachings that Christ brought to the apostles. Satan set out to find a way to pervert those teachings as the apostles taught others and then later into the second century AD to pervert the teachings of those that the apostles trained and to stop the progress of the truth and to pervert it and twist it. The first weapon Satan used in the early New Testament Church to pervert it was gnosticism. Satan used gnosticism in an attempt to get the church off track. It became a very real and a very potent threat to the early New Testament Church.

Let me read from the book, The History of Christianity by Jonathon Hill on page 64. "Without doubt, the biggest and most controversial movement within Christianity and the post New Testament period was gnosticism."

The Catholic Encyclopedia says that Irenaeus who was the Bishop of Lyon in Gaul, which is modern day France; he became bishop in 177 AD. He authored many books and only two of those books survived, and one of those books was dedicated to combating and fighting gnosticism. It was a big problem in the early New Testament Church.

Hastings Bible Dictionary on page 298 says, "One example of the danger (meaning the danger to Christianity) may be given. Simon Magus occupies a prominent place in the thoughts of many second and third century writers, and by some he is regarded as one of the founders of gnosticism." I would say Christian gnosticism because we're going to see shortly that gnosticism existed long before Christ was born.

Remember in Matthew 7:15 (we won't turn there) Christ said beware of false prophets. They're going to come to you in sheep's clothing and inwardly they are ravaging wolves. That process started not that long after the death of Jesus Christ as gnosticism began to infiltrate the church.

Let's turn to Jude, verse 3. Remember Jude is the half-brother of Jesus Christ and he is writing in verse 3 (Jude is right before the Book of Revelation). Notice what Jude says.

***Jude 3.*** *Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort [you] ... (KJV)*

To do what? Notice.

*3b) ... That you should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. (KJV)*

Now he wouldn't write this if there wasn't an effort to pervert that faith. There would be no need to write these words.

The Greek word for "faith" here is Strong's 4102 and it can mean *moral conviction, especially the reliance upon Christ for salvation*. There was an effort to pervert that and we're going to see that gnosticism relied on something else other than Jesus Christ for salvation. Jude is telling us that there was an effort to pervert that. As a result of all of this, gnosticism became the most dangerous threat to the early church.

As I said before, gnosticism was not new. Let's go back to Ecclesiastes 1:9 and see a principal that Solomon gives to us and that applies today just as well as it applied in the early New Testament Church. Notice what is said in Ecclesiastes 1:9.

***Ecclesiastes 1:9.*** *The thing that has been, it [is that] which shall be; and that which is done (done in the past) [is] that which shall be done: and [there is] no new [thing] under the sun. (KJV)*

When gnosticism came on the scene and tried to infiltrate into Christianity, gnosticism had been around for millennia. George Santayana was a philosopher and author who was born in the mid 1800s and died in the mid 1900s. He said (we've heard this before), "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." Gnosticism has reared its ugly head over and over. It was never adequately addressed or taken care of and now it rears its head in Christianity.

Hastings Bible Dictionary says of gnosticism on page 297, "The philosophy was constructed out of Jewish (notice this) and pagan and Christian elements. It was an attempt to incorporate Christianity with Jewish and pagan ideas in solving the problems of life." In other words, gnosticism mixed a little bit of truth with a lot of falsehood, and that is exactly what Satan does. That's his M.O., a little bit of truth with a lot of falsehood.

The Catholic Encyclopedia says about gnosticism, "The beliefs and practices of pre-Christian and early Christian sects condemned by the church, especially the practice of esoteric mysticism from the Babylonian Mystery Religions." Gnosticism started in Babylon. It wound up in Christianity.

Again from the History of Christianity on page 64, "Gnosticism was a secret religion with esoteric knowledge and an inner core of initiates, thus again we see what may have been the influence of the mystery religions."

By way of introduction now, we've seen that gnosticism was a major threat to the early church, but that it was nothing new. Now the question is, why should we be talking about gnosticism here today? Other than a history lesson, what's the big deal? Well,

the fact is, as we're going to see, gnosticism exists today in the greater Church of God. It exists in its entirety in the greater Church of God. The title of the sermon is just that:

### Gnosticism in the Greater Church of God

**The first thing we want to discuss is we need to define what gnosticism is.**

That's the first thing we are going to do. So let's go to Webster's Dictionary. It says this about gnosticism: "The thought and practice, especially of various cults of late pre-Christian and early Christian centuries distinguished by the conviction that" (this is something to keep in mind)...

**Number one: "Matter is evil and that emancipation (we would say salvation) comes through gnosis."**

The Greek word "gnosis" means *knowledge*, that salvation comes through knowledge. Now the English word "gnostics" means *those who know or knowers*. Gnostics are those who know.

Gnosticism sought to attain the ultimate truth by a progression of enlightenment. As you go up this ladder of enlightenment you become brighter, your emanations become brighter and your knowledge gets greater. Gnostics saw the cosmos as different levels or degrees of brightness. The highest level was heaven and it was inhabited by a superior being at its head and they called this superior being the "one" or the "revealer" and that being was the top emanation or the ultimate of brightness.

Now the next level down was the level of angels, and as we're going to see, Gnostics actually worshipped angels. So first you have heaven with the "one" or "revealer." The next level of brightness is the angelic host which, we know today, are demons.

As one descended down from that there were various classes of human beings who had varying degrees of knowledge and hence had various degrees of brightness. They believed that knowledge increased as you went up this ladder and your brightness increased as you went up this ladder. Conversely, the lower you went down, the darker you became and the less gnosis or knowledge one had.

The lowest degree on this ladder of emanations or brightness was the earth itself, because remember the gnostics taught that all matter was evil. Well, the earth is made of matter, therefore the earth is evil. They took it a step farther and said that the creator of the earth, this evil out of evil material, was also evil. This was an inferior deity which they called the "demiurge." So the creator of the physical universe, the creator of this earth was an inferior god called the demiurge. He was inferior because matter is evil and he created the universe and the earth out of matter.

**They also taught that humans had a divine nature, which we know is not true.**

Humans had a divine nature but they were ensnared by this material universe and they were ensnared by this evil creator of this material universe by this evil spirit, and humans were held captive on this earth because they were unenlightened and they had no gnosis.

The Catholic Encyclopedia says the following, “When gnosticism came in touch with Christianity which must have happened almost immediately on its appearance (meaning Christianity’s appearance) gnosticism threw herself with strange rapidity into Christian forms of thought and borrowed its nomenclature” (Christian’s nomenclature). “Nomenclature” means *describing things by name*.

We have Christian nomenclature; we talk about sanctification and justification and salvation. Those are words that describe true teachings, so gnosticism borrowed the nomenclature of Christianity.

The Catholic Encyclopedia says going on, “acknowledged Jesus Christ as Savior of the world, but they simulated its sacraments pretending to be an esoteric revelation of Christ and His apostles, flooded the world with apocryphal gospels, apocryphal acts and apocalypses to substantiate its claim.” That’s why all of us need to be very careful about reading apocryphal writings. Some people that have formerly been in God’s Church have been taken out of God’s Church by reading apocryphal writings. Many of those come from gnostic writers.

If you study gnosticism it is simply an attempt to harmonize Christian beliefs with other Oriental philosophies and Greek philosophies and there are elements of Buddhism in it, there are elements of Hinduism in it and there are elements of Greek Mythology in gnosticism.

All commentaries agree that there were many variations and sects in gnosticism, kind of like Protestantism today. You have the Episcopalians way over here which are almost identical to Catholics and then you have the movers and shakers and holy rollers and fall down and roll on the ground and all that. There are great variations within Protestantism and within gnosticism there was exactly the same.

The key to gnostic mythology is the fact that through “esoteric knowledge” (esoteric means *very special, very secretive*) the esoteric knowledge they sought enabled human beings to climb up this ladder, to rise up this ladder of brightness or enlightenment and eventually be at one with “the one.” That’s Eastern mythology. The goal of Buddhism is to be at one with the universe. Well, gnosticism, its goal of climbing up this ladder of enlightenment and through knowledge, you become one with the “revealer” or “the one.” So that’s a thumbnail sketch of gnosticism.

**The second point we want to ask (there will be three) is what was it about gnosticism that caused the apostles to so vigorously condemn it?**

What was the threat about gnosticism that caused the apostles to write against gnosticism?

Hastings Bible Dictionary says this: "In the Book of Colossians it is generally thought that the errors combated were associated with certain forms of gnosticism."

Let's go to Colossians and see a few verses regarding the attack on gnosticism. Colossians 2; we'll read verse 18 and then verse 20. Notice the warning here and understanding a little bit of what we've already talked about gnosticism, this scripture begins to take on some new light.

**Colossians 2:18.** *Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, ... (KJV)*

This was a gnostic doctrine.

*18b) ... intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up ... (KJV)*

We know knowledge puffs up.

*18 continued) ... by his fleshly mind, (KJV)*

I will read verse 20 out of the New Living Translation because it's clearer.

*20) You have died with Christ, and He has set you free from the spiritual (evil) powers of this world. So why do you keep on following the rules of the world, such as, "Don't handle! Don't taste! Don't touch!"? (NLT)*

Remember the gnostics taught that matter was evil, so you shouldn't touch this or do this or participate in this.

*22) Such rules are mere human teachings about things that deteriorate as we use them.*

*23) These rules may seem wise because they require strong devotion, pious self-denial, and severe bodily discipline. But (here's the key) they provide no help in conquering a person's evil desires. (NLT)*

All of this "touch not", etc.; all the rules and regulations they had. We will see before we're through that there are many other scriptures that attack gnosticism.

Now in doing the research, I came up with three reasons why the apostles so vigorously condemned gnosticism.

**The first reason or point A: Gnosticism had a pagan origin and it had pagan doctrines.**

So obviously the apostles are going to counter this and teach against it. The Encyclopedia of Early Christianity says, "One of the most striking features of gnostic teaching is the elaborate mythology that explains how this world of darkness dominated by a demonic god and his powers came into being." They view the creator of the earth as a demonic god.

The Catholic Encyclopedia says, "It is the merit of recent scholarship to have proved that gnostic eschatology ..." That's a big word that means *doctrines about death and what happens after death*. The Catholic Encyclopedia says, "It's recent scholarship has proved that gnostic eschatology is simply a soul's ascent in Babylonian astrology." Gnosticism goes all the way back to Babylon.

Let's go to 1 Timothy 1:4 and see where Paul is talking to Timothy and he's addressing this issue. He's warning Timothy not to pay attention to certain things.

**1 Timothy 1:4.** *Neither give heed to fables ... (KJV)*

He's talking about gnostic mythology.

*4b) ... and endless genealogies, which minister questions rather than godly edifying which is in faith: (KJV)*

Jamieson, Fausset and Brown says this about genealogies, "Not merely such civil genealogies as were common among the Jews whereby they traced their descent from the patriarchs to which Paul would not object in which he would not hear class as fables, but it refers to gnostic genealogies of spirits." That's what Paul is addressing and warning Timothy.

So the first reason that the apostles confronted and condemned gnosticism is that it was of pagan origin with pagan teachings.

**The second reason or point B: Gnosticism taught that the god of the Old Testament was inferior and was evil.**

As I said before, since they believe that all matter was evil, therefore the one who created this evil matter must also be evil, whom they called the demiurge.

It's amazing today, many Protestant denominations do exactly the same thing. They reject the Old Testament and they condemn the God of the Old Testament as being this harsh and cruel and evil god; gnosticism right there. You see, the evil demiurge created a gnostic teaching, created this evil material universe as a restraint for unenlightened human beings, a place of restraint for unenlightened human beings. The gnostics identified the demiurge with the God of the Old Testament, which we know to be Jesus Christ. So you can see why the apostles would attack gnosticism.

Let's go to 1 Corinthians 10 and we'll read the first four verses just as a reminder, one scripture that shows that Christ was the God of the Old Testament, and they said this God was evil and harsh and cruel and captivated human beings.

**1 Corinthians 10:1.** *Moreover, Brethren, I would not that you should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea;*

*2) And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea;*

*3) And did all eat the same spiritual meat;*

*4) And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ. (KJV)*

We could have a whole sermon on proving that Christ was the God of the Old Testament. But you see, gnostic heresy denied that Christ was the true Creator God, the God of the Old Testament, therefore, gnosticism is anti-Christ. You read a lot in the New Testament about anti-Christ and they are referring to gnosticism. Let's understand that.

So the second reason is gnosticism taught that the God of the Old Testament was evil and inferior.

**The third reason, point C: Remember I said earlier that gnosticism accepted Christ as their Savior. They believed that Christ, their Revealer, did not die.**

They taught that Christ didn't die on the cross. Remember earlier I said that gnostics accepted Christ as their Savior, but in order to refute the clear scriptural evidence, you see, that Christ was born in the flesh of the Virgin Mary, gnostics came up with a false doctrine called "docetism." They began teaching that to these early Christians.

The Online Dictionary says this about "docetism" associated with gnostics: "The heretical doctrine that Jesus had no human body and His sufferings and death on the cross were apparent rather than real." In other words, Jesus only seemed to come in the flesh and when He walked the earth, He was a phantom or a ghost or some kind of spirit, but He really didn't come in the flesh.

Another word for docetism is "seemism" meaning *Christ seemed to come, but He really didn't*. The Encyclopedia of Early Christianity says this about what docetism teaches: "All that was hung on the cross was the material body that it served the revealer as a vehicle during His life. Some gnostic writings even speak as the Savior looking on with laughter as evil powers thought they were killing Him." So Christ really didn't die on the cross and gnostics denied that Christ came in the flesh and died for all of us. So you can see why the apostles just went after gnosticism with a vengeance.

With these three reasons in mind, the following scriptures we're going to read should take on a whole new meaning. Let's go first to 1 John 1. We'll read the first three verses and then to verse five. As we read these, please keep in mind that gnosticism

was pagan, gnosticism taught the God of the Old Testament was inferior and evil and that Christ did not die.

*1 John 1:1. That which was from the beginning, ... (KJV)*

Saying Christ was from the very beginning.

*1b) ... 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; (KJV)*

They're saying this can't be a ghost, this cannot be an aberration because we've seen Christ, we've heard Christ and we have actually felt Christ. Thomas could say, "I actually stuck my hands in His wounds."

*2) [For the life was manifested, and we have seen [it], and bear witness and show unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;]*

*3) That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, ... (KJV)*

He was real. He came in the flesh.

*3b) ... that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship [is] with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.*

*5) This then is the message which we have heard of Him, and declare unto you, that God is light, ... (KJV)*

Here he is playing on this gnosticism of emanations of light. God is light.

*5b) ... and in Him is no darkness at all.*

*6) If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not the truth:*

*7) But if we walk in the light, ... (KJV)*

You don't have to be up the ladder is what he is saying.

*7b) ... as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood ... (KJV)*

He is saying the real blood, not a phantom and not an aberration.

*7 continued) ... of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. (KJV)*

So you can see how John is refuting gnosticism and the claims of gnosticism. Look at chapter 4 now and the first three verses. Notice what he says.



**1 John 4:1.** *Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God; because many false prophets ... (KJV)*

And that Greek word can mean not only a foreteller of events but an inspired speaker that comes along.

*1b) ... are gone out into the world.*

*2) Hereby know you the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: (KJV)*

He says if they say anything else, that Christ didn't come in the flesh, they are not of God.

*3) And every spirit that confesses not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that [spirit] of anti-Christ, ... (KJV)*

gnosticism.

*3b) ... whereof you have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world. (KJV)*

Saying that Christ didn't really die for you; it was an aberration. He never died.

Now a final scripture under this second point; let's go to Galatians, chapter 1. Why the apostles so vigorously condemned gnosticism. We will read verses 6 through 9. There's warning after warning after warning by the New Testament writers against gnosticism.

**Galatians 1:6.** *I marvel that you are so soon removed from Him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel; (KJV)*

They're going to another gospel.

*7) Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. (KJV)*

Remember gnosticism was the weapon that Satan first used to pervert the early New Testament Church.

*8) But though we, or an angel from heaven, ... (KJV)*

Gnostics claimed that angels came down and taught them. They were really demons, but they claimed that angels were teachers of them.

*8b) ... preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. (KJV)*

Strong words.

*9) As we said before, so say I now again, if any [man] preach any other gospel unto you than you have received, let him be accursed. (KJV)*

When God says something twice, it's for emphasis. Christ said, "You shall know them by their fruits" twice in Matthew 7. We see it twice here.

So we can see now, and there are other reasons too, but at least three reasons why the apostles so vigorously attacked gnosticism.

**Now the third and final point. We get now to the present day. What are the parallels between first century gnosticism and the greater Church of God today?**

What are the parallels? Where has gnosticism infiltrated the Greater Church of God today? We're going to talk about four parallels.

**The first parallel, A: gnostics felt that they were the only true Christians.**

All the others were not true Christians.

The Catholic Encyclopedia says, "As Christianity grew within and without the Roman Empire, gnosticism spread and claimed to be the only true form of Christianity.

The Holman Bible Dictionary says on page 657, "Gnostics divided Christians into groups, usually the spiritual and the carnal. The spiritual Christians were in a special or higher class than the ordinary Christians. The spiritual Christians were the true Christians." Everyone else was a carnal, fake Christian.

Does that sound familiar? Look at the church today. Satan causes many to believe that their group is uniquely qualified to be the bride of Christ. We are the true Christians, but we're not so sure about all the rest of you. They do so to the exclusion of all the other groups. Several groups say, "We are Philadelphia. All of you guys, at best, are Laodicea."

One of the leaders of another group in the greater Church of God (I won't mention his name) but he said the following; this is a direct quote from one of his sermons, "This prophet (referring to himself) speaks for God. Here is a clear statement that God sends a 'thus saith the Lord' through one man, his watchman or prophet. The man (referring to himself) speaks for God." I have this intimate relationship with God that nobody else has. I am at a higher level of enlightenment than all the rest of you. He goes on to say, "That spiritual food, however, comes only through that prophet" (himself). "It is only through me that the Laodiceans can hear Christ's voice today."

So, there's nothing new under the sun. gnosticism taught that they were the only true Christians in the first century, second century and third century. It's still going on today.

We won't turn there, but in 1 Peter 4, Peter said if the righteous scarcely be saved, where's everybody else, where is the ungodly and sinner? The righteous are scarcely saved. The gnostics and some in the greater Church of God feel that they are the only true Christians and everybody else is a false Christian or a Laodicean or worse.

**The second parallel, point B: The gnostics felt they were more spiritually gifted than other Christians.**

They had gifts other Christians did not have.

The Holman Bible Dictionary says, "Although wide variations existed between the many gnostic sects, certain major features were common to most of them: the division of Christians into categories with one group being superior, the stress on secret teachings that only divine persons could comprehend." That was taught in the early New Testament Church and it is being taught today.

The Catholic Encyclopedia; we read it earlier, but with a different emphasis. Let me emphasize what it said here. "As Christianity grew within and without the Roman Empire, gnosticism spread and claimed to be the only true form of Christianity" (notice this) "set apart for the gifted and the elect," those who have special gnosis or knowledge.

The Encyclopedia of Early Christianity says, "From the gnostic point of view, most Christians were captive to a materialistic blindness that kept them from seeing the truth, but not the gnostics." The gnostics were the only ones that could see the truth, and we see that today. We have the truth. Nobody else has the truth. Does this sound familiar?

In our history, the Worldwide Church of God looked down on those who were not called, and that's a shame. I am ashamed to say I participated in that in years past, where you looked down on those not called, we would say unconverted and they were kind of second class human beings. I've heard them called suckers; I've heard them called a bunch of pagans, and we all have and maybe we've participated in that. You see, setting ourselves aside as a special group, more gifted than other Christians or other people. Several leaders today in the greater Church of God continue that trend. I'll quote one of them. "We are the only true extension of Mr. Armstrong's ministry, the church in which Christ is now working." The implication being that Christ isn't working in any other church or group. Now this man spent four and a half hours over two sermons (and you think I talk a long time sometimes) talking about and exalting himself and then finally concluding that he was the apostle to the twenty-first century, after four and a half hours. Therefore, since he was the apostle to the twenty-first century, those who were loyal to him were in a special category, in a special class. They were more gifted; they

were above other “Christians” and others not associated with their group, were at best, Laodicean.

Remember what Christ said in Matthew 23, “*Whosoever exalts himself shall be abased and whosoever humbles himself shall be exalted.*” We need to keep that in mind and not let that thought of being superior or somehow above other people creep into the church or creep into our fellowship or into our own minds.

Let’s go to Philippians 2:3. I’ll read it out of the New King James. You see, gnosticism in the early church should have paid attention to Paul’s letter to the Philippians and those who teach gnosticism today in the greater Church of God should pay attention to a couple of these scriptures.

***Philippians 2:3.*** *[Let] nothing [be done] through selfish ambition or conceit, ... (NKJV)*

Thinking we are better.

***3b) ... but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. (NKJV)***

All of us need to do that. All of us are children of God. All of us have the potential to be in God’s kingdom and to be eternal beings in God’s kingdom. The people out in the world, the people all around us in the church, and so we should esteem other people better than ourselves. God has called them, those in the church. God will call everybody else eventually. They’re going to be our brothers and sisters. They are our brothers and sisters and will be more so as time goes on. So who are we to look down on others? We need to esteem others better than ourselves.

Look at 1 John 3. John was attacking gnosticism as we read earlier. This scripture hit me like a 2 x 4 between the eyes about fifteen years ago, and I realized I had been so off base, I had been so deceived and it led to a lot of changes.

***1 John 3:14.*** *We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. ... (KJV)*

It can’t be any clearer than that. If we want to pass from death to life, we have to love one another, love the brethren.

***14b) ... He that loves not [his] brother abides in death. (KJV)***

So we have to ask the question: How can you love your brother and look down on your brother at the same time? How can you love your brother and say, “I’m up here and you’re down here.” We can’t do that.

So this gnostic teaching of saying that some are more spiritually gifted than others or some are more enlightened than others or some are higher up the ladder than others is absolutely contradictory to the teachings of the New Testament Church. We cannot look down on and we cannot judge our brother no matter where they attend. Their relationship is with God and we need to not look down on other people. We can't let that creep into the church.

**The third parallel: The gnostics felt that knowledge was more important than faith.**

This was very clear in the gnostic writings. Knowledge was what they sought after. Knowledge would allow them to have a brighter eminence. Knowledge would allow them to get closer to the "one" in heaven. So knowledge was more important than faith.

The Holman Bible Dictionary says, "The gnostics thought faith was inferior to knowledge. The true sons of the absolute deity were saved through knowledge rather than faith."

The Catholic Encyclopedia (we read it earlier) says, "The beliefs and practices of pre-Christian and early Christian sects condemned by the church, especially the conviction that matter is evil and that knowledge is more important than faith. Knowledge, not faith held the key to life's mysteries, in the gnostic point of view."

What about today? There is a movement among some in the greater Church of God to acquire special and exclusive knowledge. That will set us apart. That will carry us closer to the Kingdom of God. That will allow us to be saved. Some in the greater Church of God already feel that they have special knowledge, knowledge of where the location is of where we are going to leave for the place of safety, knowledge of the location of the place of safety, knowledge of whom God is exclusively working with, either a man or a group, knowledge of who the two witnesses are. Some believe that this special knowledge will get them into the Kingdom of God.

I had a good friend in the church; he is now deceased; he says, "I believe I have a leg up on the Kingdom of God if I am loyal to ... and he named a man. If I mention it, all of you would know who I was talking about. But, "I have a leg up because I'm loyal to this man."

Now the key is (regarding this esoteric or special knowledge) does this special knowledge change the way we live our lives day to day? Does it? In other words, if I know who the seven thunders are, what does that do for my life tomorrow and how I live my life? If I know exactly the chronology of Matthew 24 and Revelation, I've got it figured out to the last day, the last order of how things happen and all of that and I am absolutely right and everyone else is wrong, how does that change how I live my life today? The point is it doesn't. Is this special knowledge salvational? Does it make a difference in our salvation or is it just knowledge for knowledge's sake to elevate the self? I don't know about you, but I have enough trouble obeying the simple foundational

truths that I know without adding upon all of that a bunch of esoteric knowledge that has nothing to do with salvation or nothing to do with how I live my life every day.

You see, the Bible says knowing is not enough. Let's go to 1 John 2 and we'll read verses 3 and 4. Believe me I'm not saying we shouldn't study the Bible. I'm not saying we shouldn't study prophecy and I'm not saying we shouldn't watch, but we have to keep it all in perspective because our job is to become like Jesus Christ. Our job is to be like God the Father. Our job is to obey with our mind and our heart and our inner being and with our words and deeds.

**1 John 2:3.** *And hereby we do know that we know Him, if we keep his commandments.*

4) *He that says, I know Him ... (KJV)*

This is from the Greek word gnosis.

4b) *... and keeps not His commandments, is a liar and the truth is not in him. (KJV)*

If we don't obey, I don't care how much knowledge we have, if we don't obey the simple commands of the Bible of loving God with all our heart and loving our neighbor as ourselves, we can know all kinds of stuff and it buys us nothing, absolutely nothing.

Look at 1 Corinthians 8 and we'll read the first two verses. Paul is talking about things offered to idols, but there is a principal here.

**1 Corinthians 8:1.** *Now as touching things offered to idols, we know that we all have knowledge ... (KJV)*

Yes, but notice what he says.

1b) *... knowledge puffs up, but charity (love) edifies.*

2) *And if any man think that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know. (KJV)*

It can't get any clearer than that. If knowledge is our goal, if knowledge is the thing that sets us above other Christians and other human beings, he says, "You don't know a thing. You don't understand the basics." Look at 1 Corinthians 13:2. This gets it down to the most basic of all. Paul starts off with four words and he says,

**1 Corinthians 13:2.** *And though I have ... (KJV)*

Let's skip prophecy. Let's skip down to,

2b) *... and though I have all knowledge ... (KJV)*

Then we'll skip faith and the words there.

*2 continued) ... and have not love, I am nothing. (KJV)*

It buys me nothing to have all this esoteric, this special knowledge that supposedly sets me apart from other human beings. You see, we are not saved by knowledge. We have to get that into our heads. Ephesians 2:8; I think we know that by heart but let's just turn there for emphasis. This makes it very clear of what saves us. It's not because we warm a certain seat with a certain group. It's not because we have certain knowledge.

***Ephesians 2:8.*** *For by grace are you saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: ... (KJV)*

Meaning grace doesn't come from us, it comes from God and Christ. Faith doesn't come from us, it is a gift from God and Christ. Both of them are gifts from God, grace and faith.

*8b) ... [it is] the gift of God: (KJV)*

Knowledge isn't in the subject here. It doesn't say, "and yes but you have to have ..." It doesn't say that at all.

Let's go back to Acts 4 and break into Peter's speaking here. We will read verses 10, 11 and 12. Peter is telling them some fundamental truths. Notice what he says.

***Acts 4:10.*** *Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel (this fundamental truth), that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, ... (KJV)*

Not an aberration. Christ actually died.

*10b) ... [even] by Him does this man (Peter referring to himself) stand here before you whole. (KJV)*

Meaning complete, "I've had my sins forgiven," he is saying.

*11) This is the stone (referring to Christ) which was set at nothing of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. (KJV)*

Now here is the key in verse 12.

*12) Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved. (KJV)*

Meaning through Christ's life and His death and His sacrifice and His body and His blood and His resurrection, we are saved, not through knowledge. That was the third one, point C, that gnostics felt knowledge was greater and more important than faith.

**The last and fourth parallel is: Within gnosticism there was always a strict hierarchy.**

Those at the top emanations, just below the one and just below the demons were men and various classifications and hierarchy of men. The ones in the highest hierarchy of men had the most gnosis and they were the brightest, and then as you descended down there was less knowledge and less brightness. The key to their mythology was that by having this esoteric, this special knowledge they could rise up the ladder of enlightenment and eventually be one with "the one." That comes straight out of Buddhism. If you studied and had this special knowledge and the angels spoke to you and gave you this special knowledge, you went up the ladder of brightness and eventually you could be at one with the brightest of all, the "revealer" or "the one."

The History of Christianity by Jonathon Hill says (we read it earlier) "Gnosticism was a secret religion with esoteric knowledge and an inner core of initiates," we would say today an in group. There was always an in group, an inner circle, a strict hierarchy of enlightened ones.

Those of you that have been in Worldwide for decades, does that sound somewhat familiar? You see, in the Worldwide Church of God in our history there was a strict hierarchy of rank, of offices, therefore, there was a strict hierarchy of enlightenment. In those days starting in the late '50s then expanding radically in the '60s and '70s, there was extreme rank consciousness. Those of a higher rank looked down on those of a lower rank. Those of a higher rank had more gnosis, more knowledge. We've all heard the term, "dumb sheep" referred to the brethren because the dumb sheep had no gnosis.

I've mentioned it before, my first ministerial lunch at the Feast of Tabernacles in 1974, as an elder I sat across from a couple and she asked me when I graduated from Ambassador College and I said that I didn't, and that ceased the relationship at that moment. She did not talk. She did not make eye contact. She made it very apparent she was talking to people on either side of me. I was across the table. She talked to people on either side of her, but she would not talk to me because I had no gnosis, because I didn't go to Ambassador College, therefore I was lower down in enlightenment than she and her husband were. You see, there was always an in group in gnostic hierarchy and in the Worldwide Church of God there always was an in group, an inner circle with special gifts and new understanding could only be revealed to those at the top, those with the most gnosis, those with the most enlightenment. In other words, the church made a drastic error because they substituted rank for job descriptions and made rank out of job descriptions.



Let's go to Ephesians 4 and we'll read verses 11 and 12. Let's understand that these are job descriptions and yet the church turned them into ranks, hierarchies of enlightenment just like the gnostics did. Referring to Jesus Christ ...

***Ephesians 4:11. And He gave some, apostles; ... (KJV)***

The word in the Greek means *he that is sent*. That's a job. You're sent out.

*11b) ... and some prophets; ... (KJV)*

The Greek word can mean either *a foreteller* or by analogy, *an inspired speaker*. So some people had that talent and they were given the job of going around and speaking.

*11 continued) ... and some evangelists; ... (KJV)*

The Greek word "evangelist" simply means *a preacher of the gospel*. Again, a job description of people who would go out and preach.

*11 continued) ... and some pastors and teachers; (KJV)*

Again, these are job descriptions. The reasons these jobs were there, in verse 12, not to elevate a human being.

*12) For the perfecting of the saints, ... (KJV)*

Meaning for helping and serving others in the church.

*12b) ... for the work of the ministry, (KJV)*

"Ministering" means *serving and giving, a deacon so to speak*.

*12 continued) ... for the edifying of the body of Christ: (KJV)*

These were jobs for serving the brethren and yet it was turned into a gnostic heresy of rank, rank, rank and separating and dividing people and appealing to pride and vanity. It continues to this day. "Come and kneel at my feet, that I might enlighten you." It's the same mentality, something that we have to be very careful of.

Look at Peter's example. If anybody could brag and say, "I did this for Christ; I chopped off the guy's ear; I was out in the front and I was the most vigorous advocate of Christianity," etc. He could do all this bragging. "I saw Christ. I was with Christ." Look at 1 Peter 5:1. Peter is telling the elders that, "Hey! We're all elders."

***1 Peter 5:1. The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, ... (KJV)***

He could have said, "I'm an apostle. I'm a prophet. I'm an evangelist. I'm a teacher. I'm this or that." He said, "I'm an elder, just like you guys."

*1b) ... and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, ... (KJV)*

"I was there. I saw it."

*1 continued) ... and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed. (KJV)*

As they all were. He could have glorified himself. Remember President Nixon during the Watergate issue; he kept repeating, "I am the President!" If you remember that, those of you who were alive back then. He said, "I am the President!" That tells me he was kind of worried that he might not be the President or he was worried people would think he was not the President. If you have to keep repeating that, "I'm in charge or I'm this or that," all that does is speak to the insecurity of a human being. Peter just said, "Look, I'm an elder, I saw Christ, I participated in this," and then he begins to talk to the elders.

Our focus, you see, should be on God, on Christ, on their word and not some organization or some hierarchy of men or some rank or whatever. Our focus should be serving the brethren as Christ told Peter, "Feed My sheep; feed My lambs; feed the sheep."

Make no mistake, gnosticism is alive in the greater Church of God. It really is and that's something all of us have to be careful about.

So let's understand, all of the gnostic teachings have one origin. That origin is Satan. It came into Babylon through Satan and existed to this day through Satan. Satan tried to inject gnosticism in the early New Testament Church. He is trying and has tried and has succeeded in injecting gnosticism into the modern day greater Church of God.

Let's go to 2 Peter 2. We were in 1 Peter just a second ago. We will read the first three verses. You see, Peter knew what was going on and he warns us in this second epistle.

**2 Peter 2:1.** *But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privately shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, ... (KJV)*

Gnostics were saying, "Christ didn't buy us. He didn't die. He was looking down from heaven and laughing at those who were trying to kill Him." Peter is saying, "Boy, you had better be careful of these false teachers because they are denying Jesus Christ as our Savior."

*1b) ... and bring upon themselves swift destruction.*

*2) And many (not a few, but many) shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. (KJV)*

We can deny Christ in a number of ways. If you go to jail because you have absconded with tithe money, you are denying Christ and the way of God is evil spoken of. If you use God's tithe money to line one's pockets or to live extravagant lifestyles, you're denying Jesus Christ and setting a horrible, horrible example.

*3) And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: ... (KJV)*

And false teachers have made merchandise of God's people down through the centuries, especially so in the modern day Church of God. Notice their end.

*3b) ... whose judgment now of a long time lingers not, and their damnation slumbers not. (KJV)*

We will reap what we sow.

The gnostics had a very elaborate, a very complicated, a very highly defined salvational process up this ladder of emanations and brightness. It was very defined, yet it was very complicated and it was beyond the scope of the understanding of someone who was unenlightened; couldn't understand it. It was beyond the scope of somebody who was unenlightened. It appealed to man's pride to become an enlightened one. We even saw that in the breakup of Worldwide when certain from Pasadena went to a seminary and all of a sudden, I heard it. I was right there. I wasn't any further away than I am to you in this room saying, "You must go to seminary to have the special tools necessary to understand the word of God and you cannot understand it unless you come to somebody who has enlightened education and then we will explain it to you." Just like the priests in the Catholic Church. It's no different. You have to have a special level of enlightenment in order to make those below you understand the truth. That crept into the Church of God. The gnostic teaching was very elaborate, very complicated and only the enlightened ones could understand it.

But what does God's word say? God's word contradicts that totally. 2 Corinthians 11:3, a final scripture. Paul is saying, "I am afraid for you guys in Corinth."

**2 Corinthians 11:3.** *But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty (the same way she was deceived) so your minds should be corrupted from ... (KJV)*

What? The complicated teachings of Jesus Christ? No.

*3b) ... the simplicity that is in Christ. (KJV)*

The doctrines are so simple. Love God with all your heart; love your neighbor as yourself. The first four of the Ten Commandments deal with loving God with all your heart and the last six deal with loving your neighbor as yourself. The Sabbath ties into that, to give us time to reflect and rest and to be refreshed spiritually. The holy days tie into that because they outline the plan of salvation and we keep it every year, year after year after year and you don't have to have 150 IQ to understand it. You don't have to have esoteric training in some seminary to understand that and you don't have to be at the top rung of enlightenment to understand that.

Gnosticism was the most dangerous threat to the early New Testament Church and it remains a danger to the greater Church of God today. It is in our midst. So the warning for us is, let's not fall for these gnostic teachings in the modern day Church of God, but rather what we need to do is rejoice in the simplicity that is in Jesus Christ.