

on those who consider themselves “enlightened,” rather than accept that truth is subjective to each individual and their interpretation of the Bible as it is “revealed” to each one *personally*. Following this logic, salvation is subjective. Each person’s experience is unique and without *specific* requirements.

To combat Gnosticism in the Colossian Church, Paul wrote his letter to them to re-emphasize that salvation was through — and only through — Christ (Colossians 1:19-23; and Colossians 2:11-14). No practices combining handed down human philosophies or disciplines concerning foods, rites or keeping of special days could provide salvation — that was only through Jesus Christ. He warned against Judaistic philosophers who *claimed* to have something to offer the brethren that was better than their simple belief of the Gospel. Those philosophers were attempting to convince the Christians that something of value was being *lost or missed* if they didn’t accept the ideas of “hidden knowledge” and bodily disciplines as a part of their religion. In Colossians 2:2-4 Paul explained that *Christ* is the answer — not other philosophies.

“I do this in order that you may be filled with courage and may be drawn together in love, and so have the full wealth of assurance which true understanding brings. In this way they will know God’s secret, which is Christ Himself. He is the key that opens all the hidden treasures of God’s wisdom and knowledge.” (TEV)

Then in Colossians 2:18-23, Paul told the Colossian Christians:

“Do not allow yourselves to be condemned by anyone who claims to be superior because of special visions and who insists on false humility and the worship of angels. For no reason at all, such people are puffed up by their human way of thinking and have stopped holding on to Christ, who is the head of the body. Under Christ’s control the whole body is nourished and held together by its joints and ligaments, and it grows as God wants it to grow. You have died with Christ and are set free from the ruling spirits of the universe. Why, then, do you live as though you belonged to this world? Why do you obey such rules as “Don’t handle this.” “Don’t taste that.” “Don’t touch the other”? All these refer to things which become useless once they are used, they are only human rules and teachings. Of course such rules appear to be based on wisdom in (self-made religion [NAS]) and false humility, and severe treatment of the body; but they have no real value in controlling physical passions.” (TEV)

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DILIGENCE

“We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure.” — Hebrews 6:11

A ministry of Dennis and Sherri Owens

Volume 1

August 1, 2002

Issue 12

Should Spiritualism Trump Truth?

God created us as beings with free will. Free will requires accepting the consequences of the choices that we make because of this freedom. No one, not even God will make us choose to believe in Him or the Word he has left for us. It is our choice.

The two obvious choices concerning God would be to believe in God or to reject that there is a God. Thus the Theist (belief in a God or gods) and the Atheist (a person who believes there is no God).

For purposes of this article we will be focusing our attention on fellow Theists and their beliefs and practices. There is currently a great movement among many Theists to not allow *Biblical Truth* to get in the way of “new truth” by teaching that the Bible *is the* truth. Some today go so far as to boldly state, “It is impossible for an honest Bible study to occur, since everyone does so simply to *reinforce* their *preconceived* belief on any given topic.” The result of this arrogant attitude is to reject the Bible as truth and search for truth in other ways. This may be done in many ways, but the conclusion is the same. For an individual who finds him/her self holding such an attitude, there is no longer an absolute source for truth (because it would always be tainted by previous convictions). Therefore, for one to know just what truth actually is, one’s only choice is to reach the point of “enlightenment” or the acquiring of a “mystical knowledge” only known or revealed to *certain* individuals. Thus we enter the realm of the spiritual elite, or the Gnostic. We can barely scratch the surface of what is written concerning this departure from Biblical Christianity, but would like to share some of what has become obvious in our research.

Gnosticism is defined in *The New Book of Knowledge Encyclopedia* as:

“mystical belief primarily prevalent during the second century. It taught existence of higher knowledge attainable by a select few. It was derived from Oriental beliefs and elements of Judaism, combined with Christian teachings. It emphasized deliverance of soul from the evil material world through spiritual enlightenment.”

Webster’s New World Dictionary defines Gnosticism as:

“a system of mystical religious and philosophical doctrines, combining

Christianity with Greek and Oriental philosophies, propagated by early Christian sects that were denounced as heretical”

Still one more definition of Gnosticism refers to it as:

”a classic heresy which taught that the spiritual elite possessed “hidden knowledge” of the divine realm which placed their personal revelations, spiritual experiences, and private interpretation above the ordinary revelation of God’s Word.

From these definitions we see that the Gnostic has *mystical* knowledge (not Scriptural knowledge), beyond the understanding of others because it is unique to them through the “spirit.”

While the heresy of Gnosticism takes many divergent turns, overall it centers on a search for “higher knowledge” — not intellectual knowledge — but a knowledge that the ordinary Christian is incapable of attaining. According to Gnostic thought, once the Gnostic comes into possession of this extraordinary knowledge, s/he has “salvation.” The Gnostic believes that s/he makes his/her own way to God through this knowledge and that faith and one’s deeds have absolutely no significance toward salvation or his/her life.

The early church (as well as the church today) was greatly influenced by certain philosophies of the day. The Colossians were being threatened by Gnosticism. They were accepting a heresy that was a fusion of Judaism and philosophies handed down by men. The heresy also included a form of bodily self-denial and was apparently being accepted by the Colossians to the point of endangering the true Gospel of Christ that they had been taught. Since this heresy had quickly become a major opponent of the Gospel during the early days of the church, Paul wrote his letter to the Colossians specifically to warn those Christians to not fall victim to such heresies that were corrupting the simplicity of their belief in Jesus Christ. In Colossians 2:8 he wrote:

“See to it then, that no one enslaves you by means of the worthless deceit of human wisdom, which comes from the teachings handed down by human beings and from the ruling spirits of the universe, and not from Christ.” (TEV)

It seems that there is currently a massive resurgence of this same heresy becoming prevalent in the church today. The danger that Gnosticism posed to the early Christians is the same for Christians today. Gnosticism teaches a “form of Godliness but denying the power thereof” (2 Timothy 3:15).

Many things that are taught and accepted by Gnostics *very closely* resemble truth but when fully disclosed differ considerably from the true Gospel. We are seeing within our own brotherhood today, endorsement of more and more books

that teach employment of certain “disciplines.” These “disciplines” are described as the *only* practices through which one can find the true path to spiritual growth. Many authors are professing that without exceptional use of certain disciplines one can not grow nearer to God. These same authors endorse and encourage meditative New Age practices such as “centering-down” and frequently quote New Age authors in their own works. It is unfortunate that such authors generally ignore the fact that the *real* “path to spiritual growth” is through study and understanding the Word of God Himself as it is revealed to each of us in the Scriptures that He left for our use (II Timothy 2:15 and II Timothy 3:16-17).

Christians who have succumbed to the heresy of Gnosticism may manifest “spirituality” in one or more of the following ways:

- A show of humility with deep piety characterized by mysticism or professing to have visions or dreams with revelations from “god.”
- Certain “spiritual ones” claim to have knowledge of the truth that ordinary (or not “enlightened”) Christians do not or can not possess — a “higher knowledge” beyond that revealed by God through the Scriptures.
- Superior knowledge based on new discoveries and new revelations are a sign of spiritual depth and maturity.
- Continual search for deeper spiritual experiences rather than a deepening faith in God’s Word.
- “The way to know God is to feel Him” is thought to be the true mark of spirituality.
- Look for the *inner voice* (gnosis) for divine direction.
- Spirituality is centered on a subjective Christ-consciousness rather than on faith in God’s Word.
- Spirituality is structured around subjective experiences with little regard for the Scriptures.
- Rejection of authority that is spoken of in the Bible.
- Considers matter to be evil and the source of evil. The “spiritual” only is considered to be good.

Gnostics may exercise their freedom in Christ by rejecting church structure (i.e., elders, deacons, etc.) with defined roles. This is a sign of their greater understanding. No one can tell a Gnostic they should do anything because they answer to the “inner spirit” active within *them*. The Word of God is replaced by more recent information received individually by the “indwelling spirit” — not through study of God’s Word aided by the “Indwelling Spirit.”

The reliance upon knowledge and understanding (or enlightenment) that is unique to each Gnostic, reduces arguments because there is not *just* truth, but rather there are *many* truths. Each truth has equal value. Those who are not “enlightened” continue to frustrate themselves by trying to impose *Biblical truth*

Important Personal Note from Dennis and Sherri

It is our belief that many Christians today are *unwittingly* being led into modern day Gnosticism. Additionally, we believe that Christians who were born into believing families are at greatest risk. They grew up in a Church that has long held that the Bible *is* truth. They accepted teaching from their families without personally knowing the Word of God. They accepted Christ in baptism as they were taught by their families, still often times without *personally* grasping Scripture. Because there is opportunity to be accepted as a “Christian” without actually becoming one, many people are miserable in their faith. Attending church services was never pleasant for them, but rather something to be tolerated until they could get on their own. At college they learn of many things they are missing in the “miserable Bible based, fundamental” church in which they grew up. Now, they are *really* frustrated because, 1) they never really accepted Christ as stated in the Bible, and 2) There are so many people who are sharing these awesome feelings, that they never had. They cannot accept the fact that they never were Christians in the first place, so there *must* be a way to get this feeling. Along comes someone who can explain how to get the “feeling” that has been missing. They profess a regiment of things and/or “disciplines” that can be done to fill the void they have. They begin to believe that *anything* that brings conflict must be wrong. They are taught that others might not take kindly to their new understanding or “enlightenment” and that they should have pity on them. Once the new teaching and techniques have really taken hold, “unenlightened” people seem *so* unfortunate *now* — with what seems to *them* to be their ancient beliefs. In fact it is soon noticed that unless the “enlightened” keep to themselves and away from the unenlightened the feelings will diminish. As the “enlightened feelings” increase, it is perceived that they are overcoming all weaknesses, and are in fact, becoming one with God. Those who still have weakness must focus and become more “spirit” filled. Finally the feeling has arrived. They “feel” so unified that anything that would disturb the feeling *must* be of the Devil and must be rejected outright. Sharing experiences with other “enlightened ones” and sharing how God has revealed specific things through dreams or visions strengthens the feeling and resolve of their “new reality.” They go further and eventually feel that the alignment with God is so strong that they do that which is in direct agreement with Him. They in fact, now perceive that they are *so* in tune with God that *His* will is *always* the same as *their* will. They no longer have to rely on faith in God, because of their own experience and “feelings” of closeness with God, the “new reality” has been attained — they *are* God.

They now know that this is something quite different from what they were taught as a youngster in Bible classes and by their now “unenlightened” parents. Once “enlightened” it is hard to return to placing faith in God.

We agree it *is* different, but it is not from God. It is *not* what the Scriptures teach.