



1 John and Gnosticism

Gnosticism

- Gnostics believed that we should become like god by growing in knowledge and learning all we can about intermediate gods
 - “But the NT never uses the terms ‘Gnostic’ or ‘Gnosticism’”
 - “Knowledge” is the word; twenty-five times in 1 John. E.g. - 1 Jn.2:3
 - Cf. “denomination”

1 John 2:18-21, 26-27

Combination of OT, human philosophy, mysticism [direct knowledge of God, spiritual truth, or ultimate reality, attained through subjective experience (as intuition or insight)].

- By whatever name . . .
 - They were real . . . and dangerous
 - They are more popular than ever
- Gnostics held many false views

I. Jesus

The position

- Gnostics thought material / physical things were **evil**; spiritual things, good. God, the Spirit, is all good
- Good God could not create a physical world (evil)
- Good God created another god, who created another god, etc. until one turned out bad – **Jehovah of the OT...** He created the world
- If material /physical things are evil, Jesus could not possess a real body

Gnostic Explanations Of Jesus

1. **Docetic** view: Jesus merely *seemed* to have a body

And they brought two wrongdoers
and crucified the Lord in the middle
of them. But he was silent as having
no pain –Gospel of Peter

Gnostic Explanations Of Jesus

1. Docetic view
2. **Cerinthus**: chief champion of Gnosticism in Ephesus in John's day –
 - Jesus was physical son of Joseph, a mere man
 - The divine "eon" **Christ** was united w. **Jesus at his baptism** and left him in the **Garden of Gethsemane** (before crucifixion)

Gnostic Explanations Of Jesus

1. Docetic view
2. Cerinthus
3. **Basilides – Jesus was never crucified**

Simon of Cyrene, not Jesus, was crucified; Jesus exchanged forms w. him on the way, and, standing unseen opposite in Simon's form, mocked those who crucified him, and then ascended to heaven

John immediately combats

Docetism, 1 Jn.1:1-4

They and we commonly use
neuter of persons

- Gn.2:18, *help meet*
- "*That no good...*"
- "*Who / what is it?*"

Jn.3:6; 4:22;
6:37, 39;
1 Jn.5:4

Masculine would refer to Jesus . . .

Neuter is most comprehensive . . .

includes attributes, words, works of
the Word and Life manifested in flesh

1 Jn.1:1-4

- If John *handled* Him, He was in a *real body* [refutes Docetism]

- Lk.24:39–

Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have.

- Jn.19:35

1 Jn.4:1-3, many false prophets...

- **2, John: He** *"...has come in the flesh"*
 - **IN** flesh, not 'into' [*refutes Cerinthus*]
 - Came *in* human nature; *became* flesh
- **3, not to confess** → *"Antichrist"*

This confession does not say other items of faith are unimportant . . . (cf. 2:22)

John fights chief error of that age

1 Jn.4:1-3, many false prophets...

- 2, "...has come in the flesh."
- 3, "*Antichrist*" (Mk.13:22)
 - Five times, 1 Jn.2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 Jn.7
 - Not one person, but many, 2:18
 - Present in 1st Century (2:18; 4:3)
 - Generic word: implies spirit of unbelief & rebellion (Lk.19:14)
 - Various manifestations: docetism; atheism, religious leaders, etc.

1 Jn.5:6-8, water...blood

- **Water = His baptism**
 - Jn.1:29-34, explains His whole ministry
 - Mt.3:16-17
 - "...*not only by water*" (Cerinthus)
- **Blood = His death on the cross**
 - Jn.19:28-30
 - Cf. Mt.27:45, 51, 54

I. Jesus

II. Truth

Gnosticism as a whole is rationalistic

- Reason [logic] not Scripture is chief source and test of knowledge
- Seeks to “answer questions outside the scope of the OT and the apostolic witness, and to do so on wholly non-biblical assumptions” –Walls

Basilides' god: *Abrasax*

Letters have numerical values

- a = 1(3)
 - b = 2
 - r = 100
 - s = 200
 - x = 60
- 365

**Corresponding to
days of the year.
Archon (ruler) of the
365 heavens.**

Ptolemy to pen pal

- “You will learn the order and the begetting of all these [aeons] if you are deemed worthy of knowing the apostolic tradition which we have received from a succession, together with the confirmation of all our words by the teaching of the Savior”

Valentine and other “right wing” Gnostics paid **lip service** to Scripture

1. Valentinians claimed tradition from a disciple of Paul (Theudas).
2. Basilidians...from Peter through Glaucias, and Matthias.
3. Others chose James the Lord's brother, or Thomas (Didymus, twin).
4. Gospel of Thomas (12-13).

Apostle John connects truth with the Word

1. 1 Jn.1:10, word not in us...
2. 1 Jn.2:4-5, keeps His word...
3. 2:7, the word you have heard...
4. 2:14, word of God abides in you...
5. Jn.17:17, Your word is truth...

Conclusion (1/2)

1. Truth exists, 1 Jn.3:19
2. Error exists, 1 Jn.2:21
3. Truth contradicts error
 - a. **Lie**, 1 Jn.1:6; 2:21, 27
 - b. **Liar**, 1 Jn.1:10; 2:4, 22; 4:20; 5:10
 - c. **Error**, 1 Jn.4:6

Conclusion (2/2)

1. Truth exists
2. Error exists, 1 Jn.2:21
3. Truth contradicts error
 - a. Lie, 1 Jn.1:6; 2:21, 27
 - b. Liar, 1 Jn.1:10; 2:4, 22; 4:20; 5:10
 - c. Error, 1 Jn.4:6
4. We must
 - a. Know truth, 1 Jn.4:6
 - b. Love truth, 2 Jn.4; 3 Jn.3-4
 - c. Defend truth, 3 Jn.8-10
 - d. Tell truth, 1 Jn.1:8
 - e. Practice truth, 1 Jn.1:6; 2:4; 3:18