

1 John and Gnosticism

INTRO: 1. **Gnostics** believed that we should become like god by growing in knowledge and learning all we can about intermediate gods.

- a. “But NT never uses terms ‘Gnostic’ or ‘Gnosticism.’” γνῶσις (knowledge) *is* the word; γινώσκω 25x in 1 Jn. [cf. 2:3]. Cf. “*denomination*.”
 - b. Gnosticism is combination of OT + human philosophy + mysticism [direct knowledge of God, spiritual truth, or ultimate reality, attained through subjective experience (as intuition or insight)].
 - c. 1 Jn.2:18-21, 26-27, whatever the name, they were real & dangerous.
 - 1) Sources: Apocryphal books; refutations of these writings (e.g.: *Irenaeus Ag. Heresies*; *Tertullian Ag. Marcion*); and NT refs.
 - 2) Books / movies have increased their popularity.
2. Gnostics held to many false views. John refutes some of them.

I. JESUS

A. Gnostics thought material / physical things were evil; spiritual things, good. God, the Spirit, is all good.

1. Good God could not create phys. world (evil thing), so He created al. god, who created al. god, etc. until one turned out bad – **JHVH of OT**; He created world (Marcion’s Demiurge, an inferior divinity).
2. If mat’l/phys. things are evil, Jesus could not have real body.
 - a. **Docetic**: Jesus merely *seemed* to have a body. ▪ Gos. Pet.
 - b. **Cerinthus**, former Jew fr. Egypt, champion of Gnos. in Ephesus in John’s day; he combined Jewish & Gnostic ideas to produce a spiritualized Mosaism. He asserted:
 - 1) **Jesus** was phys. son of Joseph, a mere man. The divine **eon Christ** united w. Jesus at his bap. [*eon* = divine power emanating fr. God, Supreme Being]. Peo. did not see what existed at the beginning (ct. 1:1).
 - 2) **Eon** left him in **Garden of Geth.** (before crucifixion).
 - c. **Basilides**, Jesus was never crucified.^[1]

B. John says much c. Jesus; immediately combats Docetism.

1. 1 Jn.1:1-4 – we often use neuter of persons. E.g.: Gn.2: 18, “*help meet*”; “*that no good...*”; “*who is it?*”; a baby: “*what is it?*” Cf. Jn.3:6; 4:22; 6:37, 39; 1 Jn.5:4.
 - a. Masc. would refer to Jesus. Neuter is most comprehensive expression to cover attributes, words, & works of the Word & the Life manifested in the flesh.
 - b. If John **handled** Him, He was in **real body** (Lk.24:39).
Jn.19³⁵ *And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you may believe.*

2. 1 Jn.4:1-3 –many false prophets...
 - a. 2, “...*has come **in** (ἐν σαρκί) the flesh.*” N.B.: **IN**, not “into” as Cerinthus: (Χρ descended into an already existing man). He came *in* human nature; He *became* flesh (Jn.1:14).
 - b. 3, confession does **not** say other items of faith are unimp. (2:22); safeguard ag. chief error of that age. ▪Mom to son: don’t take white powder from al. students... Don’t give Soc. Security number over phone.
 - c. 3, “**Antichrist.**” ἀντί = *against* and *in place of* (substitute for Jesus) – Vine, op. cit. Mk.13²² *For false christs and false prophets will rise and show signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.*
 - 1) Five times in Jn’s. letters: 1 Jn.2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 Jn.7
 - 2) *Not one* person; **many** have arisen (2:18).
 - 3) *Already present* in **1st century** (2:18; 4:3).
 - 4) Generic word; implies spirit of unbelief & rebellion. Lk.19¹⁴ *But his citizens hated him, and sent a delegation after him, saying, ‘We will not have this man to reign over us.*
 - 5) Variety of manifestations. E.g.: docetism, atheism, rel. leaders: Jim Jones, R. Cath. pope, et al.
3. 1 Jn.5:6-8, water . . . blood
 - a. **Water** = His baptism. Jn.1:29-34, explains His whole ministry. Cf. Mt.3:16-17. “...**not only by water**...” (Cerinthus).
 - b. **Blood** = His death. Jn.19:28-30. Cf. Mt.27:45, 51, 54.

II. TRUTH

- A. Gnosticism as a whole is rationalistic. Reason [logic] not Scrip. is chief source & test of knowledge. It seeks to “answer Q’s outside the scope of the OT and the apostolic witness, and to do so on wholly non-Biblical assumptions” – Walls. Basilides’ god *Abrasax*:^[2]
- B. Ptolemy, disc. of Valentinius, writes pen pal, “You will learn the order & the begetting of all these [aeons] if you are deemed worthy of knowing the apostolic tradition which we have received from a succession, together w. the confirmation of all our words by the teaching of the Savior.”
- C. Valentine et al. “right wing” Gnostics paid lip service to same authority as faithful churches (Lord & apostles). Rel. leaders!
 1. Valentinians claimed a trad. fr. a disciple of Paul (Theudas).
 2. Basilidians . . . fr. Peter through Glaucias, and Matthias.
 3. Others chose James, Lord’s brother, or Thomas (**Didymus**, **twin** – “Lord’s twin”: very close to Jesus). ▪Louisville debate.
 4. Gospel of Tho. (114 sayings attributed to Jesus) implies Thomas is source of trad. superior to Matt. & Peter (12-13).
- D. John connects truth w. the Word: 1:10; 2:4-5, 7, 14; Jn.17:17.

- CONCL: 1. Truth exists. 1 Jn.3:19, our sal. depends on it.
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. We CAN discern truth & error.
 - b. Love truth, 2 Jn.4; 3 Jn.3-4.
 - c. Defend truth, refute error, 3 Jn.8-10. John, apostle of love, yet cannot love w/o giving truth, disabusing minds of error.
 - d. Tell truth, 1 Jn.1:8.
 - e. Practice truth, 1 Jn.1:6; 2:4; 3:18-19. ▪Didymus the blind, on John's epistles, said John exhorted "care to urge the necessity of combining orthodoxy with right action" (Plummer, xcvi).

^[1] 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 (Sch. II, 471).

^[2] Abrasax letters have numerical values: (a = 3; b = 2; r = 100; s = 200; x = 60 = 365, corresponding to days of the year – Archon (ruler) of the 365 heavens.