

NEO - G N O S T I C S

The ancient Greeks had some unusual ideas about the creation of the world. In their philosophy, their god was far removed from his creation. He had created many self-replicating beings, called "emanations". Each emanation gave rise to another emanation which sprang from it, creating an infinitely large series of beings. Each emanation was more remote from god than it's predecessor. Each one was less like god in character. The final being of the series, the "Demiurge" was totally unlike god, was oblivious to god and was, in fact, hostile to the principles and character of god. It was the Demiurge, the Greeks believed, who was the creator being.

They believed that the creator and his creation were evil. All matter was evil, in contrast to the things that were spirit, which were good. This duality of the nature of things was seen by many Greek philosophers throughout creation. They perceived the world to be composed of pairs of opposites that were separated from each other in the Demiurge's act of creating the universe: Hot and cold, light and dark, male and female, right and left, wet and dry, good and bad.

Since spirit was good and the material world was bad, god, being spirit, could have no contact with the creation. The creation itself was evil. Christians should contrast this view with the evaluation the Creator actually made about His material creation:

GEN 1:31 And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day.

Greek philosophy had an unfortunate influence on Christianity in the first century. The concepts of Greek philosophy became amalgamated with the doctrines of the early church, giving rise to pernicious heresies that the apostles had to deal with. One of the most troublesome of these heresies for John and for Paul was a philosophy we call Gnosticism. It is not clear whether Gnosticism originated among early gentile Christians, or if Gnosticism predated Christianity, but it was undeniably a corrupting influence on the young Church.

The Colossian Church, for example, was being troubled and criticized by Gnostic ascetics. In one brand of Gnosticism, it was believed that the body and its needs, being material and evil, must be denied. Adherents to this philosophy customarily denied themselves the creature comforts, food and drink in particular. When these people encountered Christians who had abandoned the ascetic lifestyle, they criticized and persecuted them. Paul had to assure the Colossians that they shouldn't let themselves be judged by their ascetic neighbors:

COL 2:16 Let no man therefore judge you in meat [eating], or in drink [drinking] [the best translation is James Moffat's, "eating and drinking"], or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: 17 Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body [is] of Christ.

Paul is telling the Colossians to let the body of Christ, the Church, judge their behavior, not the ascetics.

Gnostic doctrine incorporated elements of Greek philosophy with Christianity and began to assimilate Christians into their numbers. Much of the writing of the Apostle, John, was done to counteract and refute this heresy.

The name we have given these people, Gnostic, is derived from the Greek, "Gnosis" or knowledge. So great was their emphasis on the attainment of hidden, arcane knowledge, they believed that salvation was gained through knowledge. They had a system that must have been similar to Freemasonry. There were many levels of acquisition of knowledge. Salvation was accomplished by the work of the individual as he learned the hidden secrets of the cult and progressed through the various levels of knowledge.

The Gnostics did not teach that salvation came through Jesus Christ, but rather through the acquisition of KNOWLEDGE. For them, salvation had nothing to do with the sacrifice of Christ. Gnostics could not accept that it was possible for God to come in the flesh. God was spirit, which was good, and flesh was material or evil.

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One branch of Gnostics, the Docetists, thought that Christ was an incorporeal phantom who only appeared to be fleshly. It is to the Gnostics that John attributes the title, Anti Christ.

2JO 1:7 For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.

We know that knowledge is important. John describes knowledge as light and ignorance as darkness. The Christian knows, however, that salvation is of Jesus Christ, not acquisition of secret knowledge.

ACT 4:12 Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.

If there are any Gnostic sects in existence today, it is unlikely that they will be a threat to any of the congregations of God's Church. There is a seductive allure, however, in knowing things that few other people know. Christians acquire an extensive array of facts about prophecy, law and commandments, holy days, God's purpose, the meaning of mankind's existence that are not accessible to those who do not have God's spirit.

1CO 2:12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. 13 Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual. 14 But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

There is a temptation to feel superior as a result of superior information, teaching or training.

1CO 8:1 ...Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth.

Paul tells us here that it is nothing more than a feeling of superiority, rather than something substantial. Is it possible that modern Christians sometimes delude themselves with the thinking that they will be saved by what they know? Knowledge, by itself, only inflates the ego. Knowledge is deceptive, when it convinces us that we are special only by virtue of knowing. It doesn't build anything that will last. Just having knowledge will not save us. Charity, or love, on the other hand, builds something. Now if you have knowledge and love, and if that love is focused into action, something useful, something substantial can be built.

Salvation is the free gift of God, made possible through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Christ said that he would freely give salvation to those that used their knowledge and other talents to serve their fellow-man. Salvation is a matter of knowing something AND DOING something:

MAT 25:31 When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: 32 And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: 33 And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. 34 Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: 35 For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: 36 Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. 37 Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? 38 When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? 39 Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? 40 And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.

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This bit of knowledge, if we act on it, will help gain us entrance to the Kingdom of God. Christ regards any act of kindness done to the least of His brethren as an act of kindness done to him. Its important to KNOW that and to DO something about it. Knowing alone is not enough. The book of James makes it clear that to have knowledge without using it to do good is a sin!

JAM 4:17 Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.

Christ regards neglect of the brethren and acts of hostility against the brethren as against Himself. Christ took it personally when the Pharisee, Saul, persecuted the Church:

ACT 9:3 And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: 4 And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?

He regards our neglect of others as personal neglect of His needs:

MAT 25:41 Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: 42 For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: 43 I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. 44 Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? 45 Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. 46 And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.

If we know these things, we should be active Christians, looking for opportunities to serve and provide for the needy. If we have the opportunity and the means to benefit others, we must do good. Christians are taught to believe that their works do not save them. That is true, but salvation is only given to them who do good when they have the opportunity! Christ's own words demonstrate that salvation is given to those who work. Paul verifies this fact:

ROM 2:13 (For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified.

God chooses to give salvation to those who obey His law, even though law keeping itself will not earn eternal life.

Verse 46 of the parable consigns those who do no good works to irrevocable punishment. This punishment is the second death, from which there is no resurrection:

REV 2:11 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.

Let's not be modern Gnostics! We know that Christ has admonished us to attend to the requirements of the needy. If we don't act on what we know, our knowledge will not save us. Let us rather be active Christians, looking for ways to use our talents, our resources and our knowledge to feed the hungry, to give drink to the thirsty and to clothe those who are naked. Only when we are doing these things that Christ commands can we KNOW that we may have salvation.