

# Gnosticism

*Heresy Series*

# What is heresy?

Opening Discussion

How would a typical  
Democrat describe  
Republican ideology?  
Vice versa?

Group Discussion

*Question Inspiration:*  
*“What Did Gnostic Christians Believe?”*  
<https://youtu.be/Iuvk2bLCzwM>

# Disclaimer

- We possess more Anti-Gnostic texts than Gnostic texts... and for a long time, we had *none!*
- Our descriptions of Gnosticism are often more clear on what Gnosticism is than Gnostic writings are.
- Gnosticism seems to be more a set of **impulses** than a religion.

*“Gnosticism and the Early Church”*

*<https://youtu.be/GXc-uvCivp4>*

# But why is this important??

- Gnosticism is used to discredit early Christianity
- Gnostic heresy as a set of theological **impulses** continues today.
- Understanding Gnostic heresy can help us better understand *orthodox* Christianity.

# Gnostic Fundamentals

- The World isn't real / important.
- Hatred of the material world / things.
- Elitist / Secret Knowledge.

# *“Gnosis”*

- The Greek word for “**knowledge**”
- Salvation comes through Gnosis.
- Jesus brings that Gnosis down to earth.

# *The Gospel of Thomas*

These are the secret sayings which the living Jesus spoke and which Didymos Judas Thomas wrote down.

(1) And he said, “Whoever finds the interpretation of these sayings will not experience death.”

(2) Jesus said, “Let him who seeks continue seeking until he finds. When he finds, he will become troubled. When he becomes troubled, he will be astonished, and he will rule over the all.”



## *The Gospel of Thomas*

(3) Jesus said, “If those who lead you say to you, ‘See, the kingdom is in the sky,’ then the birds of the sky will precede you. If they say to you, ‘It is in the sea,’ then the fish will precede you. Rather, the kingdom is inside of you, and it is outside of you. When you come to know yourselves, then you will become known, and you will realize that it is you who are the sons of the living father. But if you will not know yourselves, you dwell in poverty and it is you who are that poverty.”

# Note the similarity!

*Luke 17:20–21 (ESV)*

Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, he answered them, “The kingdom of God is not coming in ways that can be observed, nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or ‘There!’ for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you.”

# Gnostic? Or not?

His disciples questioned him and said to him, “Do you want us to fast? How shall we pray? Shall we give alms? What diet shall we observe?” Jesus said, “Do not tell lies, and do not do what you hate, for all things are plain in the sight of heaven. For nothing hidden will not become manifest, and nothing covered will remain without being uncovered.”

*The Gospel of Thomas (II, 2, 6)*

“Is a lamp brought in to be put under a basket, or under a bed, and not on a stand? For nothing is hidden except to be made manifest; nor is anything secret except to come to light. If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear.”

*Mark 4:21–23*

# Gnostic? Or not?

Everyone will be salted with fire. “Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt among yourselves, and be at peace with each other.”

*Mark 9:49-50*

And he said, “The man is like a wise fisherman who cast his net into the sea and drew it up from the sea full of small fish. Among them the wise fisherman found a fine large fish. He threw all the small fish back into the sea and chose the large fish without difficulty. Whoever has ears to hear, let him hear.”

*The Gospel of Thomas (II, 2, 8)*

Is your soul more  
important than your  
body? Why or why not?

Group Discussion

# How prevalent is Gnosticism today? Does any of this sound familiar??

- Mind over matter.
- This disease is not real. It's all in my head.
- True enlightenment is found within.
- Be true to yourself.
- Search your feelings. You know it to be true.
- God is within you.
- I just want to be free of this material life and go to heaven.
- More knowledge is the solution to society's problems.

# Christian Response to Gnosticism



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“Inasmuch as certain men have set the truth aside, and bring in lying words and vain genealogies, which, as the apostle says, “minister questions rather than godly edifying which is in faith,” and by means of their craftily-constructed plausibilities draw away the minds of the inexperienced and take them captive, [I have felt constrained, my dear friend, to compose the following treatise in order to expose and counteract their machinations.] These men falsify the oracles of God, and prove themselves evil interpreters of the good word of revelation.”

Irenaeus of Lyons, “Irenaeus against Heresies,” in *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, vol. 1, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 315.

# Christian Response to Gnosticism



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They also overthrow the faith of many, by drawing them away, under a pretence of [superior] knowledge, from Him who rounded and adorned the universe; as if, forsooth, they had something more excellent and sublime to reveal, than that God who created the heaven and the earth, and all things that are therein. By means of specious and plausible words, they cunningly allure the simple-minded to inquire into their system; but they nevertheless clumsily destroy them, while they initiate them into their blasphemous and impious opinions respecting the Demiurge; and these simple ones are unable, even in such a matter, to distinguish falsehood from truth.

Irenaeus of Lyons, "Irenaeus against Heresies," in *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, vol. 1, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 315.



# Christian Response to Gnosticism



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Such, then, is their system, which neither the prophets announced, nor the Lord taught, nor the apostles delivered, but of which they boast that beyond all others they have a perfect knowledge. They gather their views from other sources than the Scriptures; and, to use a common proverb, they strive to weave ropes of sand, while they endeavour to adapt with an air of probability to their own peculiar assertions the parables of the Lord, the sayings of the prophets, and the words of the apostles, in order that their scheme may not seem altogether without support.

# Christian Response to Gnosticism



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In doing so, however, they disregard the order and the connection of the Scriptures, and so far as in them lies, dismember and destroy the truth. By transferring passages, and dressing them up anew, and making one thing out of another, they succeed in deluding many through their wicked art in adapting the oracles of the Lord to their opinions. Their manner of acting is just as if one, when a beautiful image of a king has been constructed by some skilful artist out of precious jewels, should then take this likeness of the man all to pieces, should re-arrange the gems, and so fit them together as to make them into the form of a dog or of a fox, and even that but poorly executed...

Irenaeus of Lyons, "Irenaeus against Heresies," in *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, vol. 1, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 315.

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and should then maintain and declare that this was the beautiful image of the king which the skilful artist constructed, pointing to the jewels which had been admirably fitted together by the first artist to form the image of the king, but have been with bad effect transferred by the latter one to the shape of a dog, and by thus exhibiting the jewels, should deceive the ignorant who had no conception what a king's form was like, and persuade them that that miserable likeness of the fox was, in fact, the beautiful image of the king.

Does the devil start with  
the obvious lies?  
Or small twists of truth?  
Can you think of any?

Group Discussion