

13. A SPIRIT OF ERROR I: GNOSTICISM

Have you ever seen a row of recently planted young trees? The trunk is still thin and delicate. How different from old trees with their roots firmly planted deep into the ground, with their solid trunks and spreading branches. The roots of the young trees are not deep and strong; the young trees have no solid trunks and thick branches yet. How will they fare? They'll be fine while the sun shines and the weather is beautiful. But when howling storm winds sweep over the fields, when the hail comes clattering down, what then? Then those fragile trunks are tossed to and fro, in danger of blowing right out of the ground. And yet?

The odd one may get blown over, but most will survive. The next day the storm has blown over, and those tender trees stand there more robust



The storm winds force the roots deeper into the ground.

than ever as the winds force the roots deeper into the ground

This is an example of how the fledgeling church is often like a young tree. Its beginnings are so small and insignificant. How will she fare?

Terrible storms swept over Christ's congregations. Terrible persecutions caused the Christians to be tossed to and fro. Yes, at times, it seemed like the powerful gales would destroy Christianity. The blood of thousands of martyrs soaked the earth. And yet the church was not defeated.

On the contrary! Despite the storms of persecution, it grew!

Horrific persecutions threatened Christianity, and other storms tried to destroy that young and delicate plant. Satan tried every trick to wipe Christianity from the face of the earth.

With those "other storms," I mean the many false teachings that sneaked into the church. In this chapter, I will tell you something about one of the errors called:

GNOSTICISM.

Gnosticism?

What a strange word; I've never heard of it! What does it mean? I'll try to make it clear. I won't tell you everything about it; I'll mention the main ideas because you need to know something about it, as it really confused the churches at that time.

Soon after most apostles died the martyr's death, some people started teaching strange doctrines.

We read in the Bible that God created heaven and earth in six days. We all know and believe that because God's Word says so. But at that time, some people said:

"Oh, no, we don't believe that. God can't create an evil world. Other gods, inferior gods have created this wicked world, and inferior gods have also created the bodies of men."

How foolish!

From where did those people get that nonsense? We do not read *that* in the Bible!

Those false teachers went even further.

They said: "God didn't create peoples' bodies. He only created their soul without sin, and that *perfect* soul is held captive by that *sinful* body."

But we know that inferior gods don't exist. There is only *one* God, and He has created body *and* soul. Both were good, but both soul and body have become sinful and depraved through sin. That's what the Bible tells us, and *that's how it is!* But those Gnostics did not believe that.

They said:

"No, the soul is good, and the body is evil. The evil body imprisons the good soul. But God most high,

Who dwells in heaven, sent Christ to deliver that good soul from that sinful body. Christ shall bring that perfect soul back to heaven."

But that is not true, either!

Indeed, the Lord Jesus came down to this sin-cursed earth, but He did not rescue a perfect soul from a sinful body; He came to suffer and die for His people. He came to die the death of the cross, which God had cursed. He came to deliver His people from the guilt and stain of sin. God punished Christ so that God's people would live forever with body *and* soul. That is what the Bible teaches, *and that's how it is!*

Those wicked Gnostics said:
"No, no, the evil bodies shall die, and they shall *remain* dead. The sinful bodies will not be raised from the dead but will stay in the grave forever. Good souls will go to heaven where they marry the angels and find happiness there".

Is that true?
Of course not; it is a wicked lie. The bodies of God's people will most certainly rise on the day of judgment. Those children of God will then glorify God with *body and soul*. Both Enoch and Elijah are already in heaven with glorified *bodies*!

Christ teaches us that there is no marriage in heaven. Nor will God's children marry angels. That is nonsense.

One day, God's people and the unbelievers will rise with body and soul. Hell will be their eternal destination. That's what the Bible teaches, and *that's how it is!*

Do you see that the Gnostics were utterly wrong and brought the strangest errors into the church?

But really, no one believed that, did they?
Unfortunately, yes! Thousands and thousands of people did! Thousands of Christians thought that



'Elijah is in heaven with a glorified body' <https://www.cravinggraces.com/>

the Gnostics proclaimed the truth. They honestly believed that this was the true religion!
But how could this happen?

Well, the pagans also believed in many gods. They also believed in good and evil spirits. Many pagans had become Christians. But when Gnosticism reared its ugly head and taught that there was a high god *and* lower gods, that made sense to them; they were familiar with that way of thinking as it tied in with their old beliefs.

Gnosticism, that wicked doctrine, was pure paganism, but they 'Christianised' that pagan doctrine a bit. That's why many so-called Christians believed those wrong, unscriptural things.

The Gnostics even began to write and publish books and then said that Mark, Paul, or Peter had written that book. They wrote various so-called 'Gospels' and 'Apostle novels'. In that way, the Gnostics tried to distort the Bible, the true Word of God. Corrupt bible books were written and presented as authentic! Many false writings came into existence which were said to be true.

That was *extremely* dangerous!



Some ancient gnostic gospels. Their aim was to add to the Bible. <https://www.timothypauljones.com/>

That was a very demonic attack on God's Word. Had that attack been successful, the devil would have triumphed. Then the entire doctrine of salvation would have been corrupted.

Thankfully, this didn't happen.
That attack failed.

The Lord made sure of that: He watched over His Church. God preserved His Word, the Bible.

Faithful ministers seriously warned against the doctrine of the Gnostics. When those ministers got a copy of such a counterfeit, false Bible, they said:

"No, Peter did *not* write this so-called 'Book of Peter'.

The Gnostics wrote this book!

Away with it! That book does not belong in the Bible!"

And if they got a book titled: 'Acts of Paul', then they said:

"Paul did *not* write this book.

The Gnostics wrote this book!

Away with it! That book does not belong in the Bible!"

Thankfully, the Lord decreed that wise, God-fearing men appeared during that difficult time - men who could separate the true from the false Bible books.

Precisely during *that* period, the Bible, as you have it at home, was put together and confirmed as the *complete* Word of God. No new books can be added or taken from it. The 66 Bible books together are called the 'Canonical Books'. This term means that the Bible was 'canonised' at that time, meaning 'closed'.

They rejected the false doctrine of the Gnostics and confirmed the faithful books that make up our Bible as we still have it today.

The devil's attempt to destroy God's church failed. Gnosticism was so dangerous because it was half pagan and half Christian.

The church cannot be destroyed. Though the struggle was severe, the truth will always overcome. This struggle strengthened the church because she learned to understand the true doctrine better.

I hope you understand this difficult chapter.

QUESTIONS

1. Explain the Gnostic error about creation.
2. What error did the Gnostics teach regarding the soul and body?
3. According to the Gnostics, why did God send Christ into the world?
4. What did Jesus come to do on this earth?
5. What shall occur in the resurrection regarding the soul and body?
6. What did the Gnostics teach regarding the resurrection?
7. Why did Gnosticism appeal to pagans wishing to embrace Christianity?
8. What are the 'canonical' books?

FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. Find one text in the Old Testament and one in the New Testament to prove that man is born depraved.
2. Read 1 Corinthians 6. What does Paul write concerning the body? Does this agree with the Gnostic view? Explain.
3. What does the Lord Jesus say about marriages in heaven? See Luke 20. What did the Gnostics teach?
4. How did the Gnostics attempt to change the Bible? What does Revelation 22 say regarding any changes to the Word of God? What warning does the Holy Spirit give to those who tamper with His Word?
5. What are the apocryphal books? (See Belgic Confession of Faith) How are they to be used?