

2 Peter 2:10-19

Hope in the Fight

...For the Harm They Have Done!



Antinomian Gnosticism and esotericism had become a problem in some of the churches by this time. Antinomianism said that by faith and God's grace we are freed from moral standards, religious or cultural. Previously it had been the Judaizers – false teachers that were trying to meld Mosaic Law with Christianity. They were on one side of the spectrum – “...**do not handle, do not taste, do not touch**” [Col. 2:20-23]. On the other side was **Gnosticism and Esotericism**. **Esotericism** was a wide collection of ideas – philosophical theories and religious dogmas that did not come exclusively from Christianity. They could have pagan origins. It viewed itself as the intelligent alternative to the stogy, out-of-date and out-of-touch apostle's teaching about Christ, about salvation, and about Christian morality and ethics. Esotericism espoused that people could pick and choose what they wanted to believe about Jesus and salvation. It was the early church's version of today's **universalism, which celebrates diversity of beliefs** - basically anything goes – believe whatever you want – mix and match – come up with something that fits you! It is spiritual mayhem and a recipe for disaster! Sound familiar? Some things just never change!



Gnosticism, which means “*knowing*” or “*having knowledge*” was also a collection of diverse ideas/philosophies (influence by the Greek philosophy of Neoplatonism) - the theory that all solid matter was inherently evil. Only the human **spirit** could be saved through an individual metaphysical experience of God and of the wiping away of collective *illusion* (orthodoxy) to make room for the REAL reality! They used John's imagery of the light, and especially Paul's theology of grace to come up with something quite different from either Judaism or Christianity! While the apostles taught of the need for repentance and of transformed life of love, faith, and purity, the Gnostic idea was that the instincts, drives, and appetites of the physical body could not be overcome/subdued because of the nature of matter. Matter was inherently evil and there was nothing that could be done about the impulses of our human nature. So just go with it! Indulge your physical passions and impulses! God's “Grace” will cover our bad human behavior! The apostle Paul answered them with an incredulous “**What? Should we sin, so that grace may increase? No way! These people's condemnation is deserved!**” [Rom. 3:5-8]. Then Rom. 6 speaks to the issue that sin **can be** conquered in the Christ-follower's life, since when we came to Christ in faith and trust, we died with Him to ourselves.

[1 Cor. 10:6-13]

The apostles taught that when you let go of your impulses as they emerge during the day, and you let the Spirit of God take you in a different direction - a God-honoring one, there is victory over sin - and it is a very achievable everyday state of being. But these groups, with their own teachers, believed and taught that personal enlightenment rather than orthodox apostolic teaching was the means to salvation. Knowing true reality, that we can't fight our own human nature, and repudiating the old illusions that we can - such as the apostle's teachings), **was THAT** means! We magnify the love and grace of God when we follow our own sinful nature, and when we emerge from satiating our sin impulses, by still being in the state of grace – still saved! So live it up, they taught! Join us in indulging your every base impulse and whim! God made us this way, so He understands our weaknesses! Embrace your weakness - and let God magnify Himself at the same time – by not holding it against you! This was salvation, according to the Gnostics! They considering themselves the smarter, more intellectual, and the more personally freeing option for Christians.



Of course, I too have taught that salvation begins with what we believe – what we know – because Christianity begins with knowing what Christ and the Holy Spirit of God taught the apostles! We cannot be saved without this knowledge! **“How can they believe in the One they have not heard. And how can they hear without someone telling them?” Rom. 10:14.** So the Gnostics believed in knowledge too, but just wanted to believe **other** things. Their truth grid was completely different than the orthodox Christians. Their leaders also seemed to be prolific writers, and it did not bother them in the least to write made-up stories and myths of Jesus. I remember reading in one of them – (**The Infancy Gospel of Thomas**) that Jesus as a child created living birds out of stones - because He could, maybe to show off. The **Gospel of Thomas** (which begins *“These are the hidden words of Jesus...”*), the **Gospel of Judas** (which turns Judas into the obedient hero – the only disciple that Jesus really confided in), **The Apocryphon of John** (or **“The Secret Book of John”**) where Jesus actually came back to give **NEW** Knowledge.

As you can tell , these books really promoted themselves as possessing “secret” knowledge. Cults everywhere, even today, profess the “true” knowledge that their particular prophet cooked up – just one of a few thousand prophets that have “discovered” new ingredients to the Gospel! It comes to them through extra revelation from an angel, or from the Holy Spirit. Or it comes to them from a truer interpretation of what is already in the Bible. It is amazing to talk to a Jehovah’s Witness about scripture. You quote the same verses, and then you realize they have an entirely different take on the meaning of the verse! So it is not the same verse at all. The obvious meaning is rejected by them in favor of a much more complicated, far less obvious, “secret” meaning known only to their sect! It is bizarre trying to have a spiritual conversation with them. They act like they agree with your words, but they only are agreeing with their alternative interpretation of your words! It gets very confusing and complicated! I do not argue scripture with them any longer. I argue origins. . It matters who started the cult! Cult leaders are never who they present themselves to be to their followers. They present themselves as strong, wise, superior, but they always fail if you look a little deeper! It is always a cult’s greatest weakness, particularly with the Watchtower organization and the Mormons, and most of them know nothing of these dubious origins.



At any rate, this is the same type of thing that the Apostles were faced with, and so they were always traveling to churches in trouble, or writing to struggling churches, to lay down a solid foundation of orthodoxy of belief so that they had a protective understanding of true Christianity. It was exasperating work however, and you can tell that Peter has just had it with these people! He is calling down the wrath of God upon them here!

He alludes to the fact here that they had gone into angelology and demonology, and he derides them for messing with areas where there is great mystery and even great danger! He says that even the angels do not insult their demonic counterparts! Why? Well we cannot know that! So it is better not to mess with it! There are forces at work behind the veil of the heavenly realms that we know nothing about! Yet, most of us do it with impunity. Maybe we had better not! Even the scriptures admit that Satan has been given some sort of authority and freedom that allows him to exorcize dark power over the people of this earth. It might be better if we do not tweak his nose! Peter chides the false teachers for, once again, not knowing what they are talking about or what they are doing! They are just crafty instinctive animals, setting themselves up to have influence over women who they have studied and assessed are more likely to be promiscuous, and they have no problem taking advantage of people with money so that they might be compelled to hand it over to them! We see it all the time today in TV land, on radio, and now, on the internet! It is absolutely diabolical how good these false teachers are at separating people from their hard earned money! Some of these televangelists are on their 2nd or 3rd multi-million dollar private jet! It is known to their followers and yet they continue to send in their money! It is a crazy human thing - as nutty as fruitcake, yet there it is! Well, it was happening 2000 years ago also! In verse 15, Peter brings up the Old Testament prophet Balaam, who was paid by enemies of Israel to prophesy a curse of God upon Israel. This unscrupulous self-proclaimed prophet fully intended to earn his money and pronounce a curse from God upon Israel – that is, until God would not let him, warning him from the mouth of a talking donkey to speak only what He, God, actually told him to speak! If God could speak through a donkey, He could speak through a false prophet,.. and he intended to! Balaam, despite his desire to earn his money, ends up blessing Israel on more than one occasion when he is trying to curse them!



In **vs. 17,18**, Peter proclaims that these false teachers and false prophets have nothing but hopelessness for people! They are dry springs, and clouds without real rain! But they are clever - and they cleverly deceive the weak – those on the edge, who do not know yet what they truly are supposed to believe or how important it is - either because they are so new to the faith and haven't had time to learn, or because of their negligence! Perhaps they are just lazy, unmotivated, and uncommitted! In that case, they are easy targets for the spiritual wolves!



We are almost done with Peter's outraged diatribe against false teachers. These guys abused one of the best things about the gospel. They abused the grace and forgiveness of God! They made into a divine permission slip to dive right back into an immoral pagan lifestyle! It was a truly sickening development in the church in any church age. I have to say that I believe that it is still going on today. Let me caution you about something. I have seen the development of something in the church that is being called "*being real*" or "*authenticity*" or "*transparency*". We see people being praised today for their honesty about being weak, and being sinners. It is good to be honest, and to not portray yourself as something you are not. But it should be far from us to say that sinning is okay! That is the direction it has been going! Pastors giving foul-mouthed sermons, people giving themselves excuses - touting the grace of God as their way out of taking full responsibility! We are supposed to be taking truly heart-broken responsibility for our failures to a God who has never failed us! The Godly sorrow of **2 Cor. 7:10** has to do with grieving, mourning, wailing, says Paul. We are supposed to **REPENT**, not identify chiefly as a loosely committed Christian! We are **NOT** helpless before our human nature, but have an all-powerful ally in the Holy Spirit! He is there to help us and to give us everything we need for life and Godliness through our knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and goodness! Let's not abuse His grace but use it as He intended it to be used – to pick ourselves off of the mat of defeat and learn from it and grow in the grace of God to be conquerors, not the conquered! [**Rom. 8:37**]