

Gnosticism<sup>1</sup> became fully developed in the years shortly after Christ, during the foundational period of the church. One reason for this was that the works and teachings of Christ, in the eyes of the Gnostics, seemed to legitimize their claims of accessing a special power or higher existence through secret knowledge. They now had a figure to point to as proof that humanity possesses a “divine spark” waiting to be released through knowledge. As the first-century church grew, so did the influence of Gnostics who tried to convert believers while still presenting themselves as the true teachers. In some cases, they were even successful. This constant threat helps explain why Paul was so deeply concerned and why he toiled so tirelessly for the churches.

A somewhat modern version of Gnosticism can be seen in Scientology. Scientology teaches that people carry hidden spiritual power suppressed by ignorance and must advance through levels of secret knowledge to be freed. They even acknowledge Jesus as a real historical figure who performed remarkable things, but they reject Him as Savior or God. Instead, they claim He simply discovered the secret knowledge that released Him from ignorance. Similarly, some self-help groups and teachers fall into this pattern, suggesting that people fail in life only because they lack access to the “special knowledge” they alone can provide.

We also encounter plenty of Gnosticism-adjacent beliefs today through social media. Countless accounts claim to possess hidden knowledge, about government conspiracies, health cures, or spiritual insights, that promises to change your life. While some of these are relatively harmless, others are actively working to draw people away from the truth we have in Christ. At our fingertips, we find what Paul described as “plausible arguments” that sound convincing on the surface and seem to explain the strangeness we experience in life. This craving for secret knowledge appears to be part of humanity’s fallen condition, and it is something we must equip ourselves, and our students, to resist with the truth of Scripture.

Beyond sound theology, we need something more if we are going to stand firm against unsound doctrine. Like Paul did for the Colossians, we must encourage the hearts of our students and teach them to love one another. In many ways, our small groups function like the corner between rounds for a boxer. When a boxer heads to his corner between rounds he is met with encouragement from his corner men. It is the same here, a time to be reminded that they are not alone, that they are loved, and that there is a community rooting for them. And just as a boxer receives instruction before returning to the fight, so too we must instruct one another in how to continue pursuing a biblical, Christ-centered life.

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<sup>1</sup> The word comes from the Greek word *gnosis* (γνῶσις) which means “Knowledge”. This is because the teaching of the Gnostics was that salvation or enlightenment comes not from faith or even works but through a secret spiritual knowledge. They desire to move from the evil physical world and closer to the pure and good spiritual world.

Therefore, this week find ways that you all can improve on mutually encouraging one another as well as show love to one another. Then find ways that we can hopefully embed them into our small groups culture.