

## Does Doctrine Really Matter? (Part 10)

Antinomianism

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Please turn with me to James 1:17-18, and we will use this as a launching pad for this sermon.

**James 1:17-18** Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. Of His own will begat He us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.

A factor essential for us to understand and make use of is that, in order for the Bible—the Word of God—to be of value to mankind at any time the children of God happen to live, the truths must be eternal. Its truths, its teachings, its doctrines must always be valid. This is anchored in what God Himself is in His nature. In Malachi 3:6, He makes a statement that is right in line with what I just read in James; but here in a different circumstance and a different context, He says:

**Malachi 3:6** "For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore you sons of Jacob are not consumed."

In this place, He proclaims this as a counterpoint to Israel's ever present and volatile faithlessness; and that He would steadfastly continue to fulfill His promises made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—even though it seemed that He had every right to just cut them off. But God is not like men. He sets His course, and He follows through.

Now, regarding Jesus—just like the Father, Hebrews 13:8 says:

**Hebrews 13:8** Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and today, and forever.

Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." (John 14:6) In other words, He personified these three factors in the manner in which He lived and in what He taught. The truths of the Word of God are like God Himself. They are eternal—never ending in their validity. They are true and can always be trusted.

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This is in contradistinction to what man is in his nature. Jesus made an interesting statement in Luke 18. We are just going to look at one verse, but this shows something that we have to deal with.

**Luke 18:9** And He spoke this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others.

God changes not. God is truth. On the other hand, it is certainly possible for men to be exactly the opposite of God—untrustworthy, and very changeable. The Pharisees of Jesus' day are a vivid example of the proclivity that is in all of us to reject truths of God's Word that we do not feel comfortable with. Or, put another way, we will reject some aspects of biblical teachings that require us to make sacrifices because we do not want to pay the price of changing.

So we trust in ourselves, and—like the Pharisees of this parable—our judgments (our decision-making processes and conclusions) become skewed and off the mark of what they would be if we allowed truth to guide us. The key here is ***trusting in themselves*** that they are right, or doing right.

Now, let us shift gears just a little bit. The ancient Greeks were no different. Their researches into the creations of God lead them into some truths about God, which they rejected in favor of their own opinions—as Romans 1 records for our learning, in order that we do not follow the same timeworn path to spiritual and physical destruction.

It matters not that a person is converted. They can still reject truth. And very often it is rejected on the basis of not being willing to make "the payment" (I guess we might say) that it might cost in order to obey what it says. So we will come up with a justification, which is usually a lie, for not fulfilling that responsibility.

It was not just the ancient Greeks who did this. The Israelites did it in the wilderness, just after being released from their bondage in Egypt. Follow me through time with this. Then, following Joshua's death, in the Promised Land they specifically ignored God's directive not to inquire how the pagans worshipped their gods. The scriptures record (in the last verse of the book of Judges) that every man trusted in himself and did what was right in his own eyes.

The Jews of Jesus' day followed the same pattern and, in the process, rejected the teachings of Jesus even as He walked among them. How many times does the book of John especially emphasize that Jesus cried to the crowds that came to hear Him,

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"Verily, verily"—which means *"I am telling you the truth!"*

Unfortunately, after Jesus' death and resurrection the pattern continued when the church began under the apostles. And despite having God's Spirit, some converted to Christianity followed the same pattern and refused to jettison themselves of Gnostic teachings when confronted by God's truth as taught by the apostles. They not only continued their polluted decision-making, but they also defiled the church by making use of those Gnostic lies.

Now, it has not escaped us either. We have been witness that nothing has changed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. When those in the fellowship of the Worldwide Church of God were confronted with massive doctrinal changes—many of which were of Gnostic origin—a pleasant chord was struck in the hearts of many; and they followed the doctrines right out of the church fellowship.

In the previous sermon of this series, we had just begun to show how Gnosticism began to be in the church. Though Gnostic belief is of Greek origin, it appears to originally have come into the church through Jews, primarily from the Jerusalem area, when they converted to Christianity.

At first, this may appear to be surprising; but, on second thought, it is not—given the Israelites' strong historical propensity to adopt pagan religions and adapt them to the way given by God. And they had ample time to do this because the Greek culture strongly influenced Judea for around 200 years before Christ's death. (That is a period of time just a little bit shorter than the United States has been a nation.)

Those converted are supposed to believe the Word of God, using it as the guide for daily life and for preparation for the Kingdom of God. However, those converts who were immersed in Greek philosophy did not completely disengage Greek thought. And herein lies a similar danger for us, in our time. Instead, they not only continued their studies in it, but they urged it upon other converts as a means of extending their influence among the converted (or unconverted, for that matter).

Do you see Satan's ploy? One of the baits was that if one knows the pagans' perspective then one can deal with their arguments better. But in the meantime, they get hooked themselves.

I do not think I will ever forget a headline on the Worldwide News that said, "What? Me Be Deceived?" It was written by Herbert Armstrong in about 1982. Ministers of the Worldwide Church of God claimed to him that they could not be deceived, which is very

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interesting. And so out of that came an article written to the whole church, so that we all might profit.

You ought to know what the general theme is of Revelation 12. It is a very encapsulated history of the people of Israel from the time of its birth, as it were, all the way up to the tribulation and through some of the tribulation.

**Revelation 12:15** And the serpent cast out of his mouth water as a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away of the flood.

That statement, in its position within the chapter, places it within the end time. Most specifically, very close to or within the tribulation; but I know for sure that it does not have to be contained entirely within the tribulation. But a flood symbolizes overwhelming evil, persecution, and death. If you want, picture Noah's flood that overwhelmed the entire earth—wiping out all except for those that God specifically protected.

Now, recall that a flood is water; and water is used in the Bible to symbolize spirit. Notice especially the source of this end-time flood. A killer. It is from the serpent's mouth. The end-time flood is not one of water. That is merely the way that God illustrated it, so that we would get the point. So we would think about Noah's flood and what it did. It wiped out life on earth because of sin.

Here we have the serpent putting out a flood, pictured as water coming out of his mouth. But this flood is not of water. It is a spiritual entity. It is **words**—written material, books, tracts, magazine articles, sermons, lectures, movies, TV presentations, and even news broadcasts as well. And the subjects pertain to things like Christian living, creation, moral issues such as abortion, homosexuality, lesbianism, stem cell research, marriage, child training, feminism, gospel music, business ethics, and on and on.

And most of these subjects—especially those pertaining to Christian living, spirituality, and morality—are approached from the serpent's appealing, subtle, clever, but nonetheless bent, twisted, and misleading perspective. And you can be sure that the chances are that they will be wildly popular among the general public. So do not forget about "flood"—*a flood of words*. That is, a flood of spiritual force.

**Matthew 24:23-24** [Jesus said:] "Then if any man shall say unto you, 'Lo, here is Christ, or there;' believe it not. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect."

He is not saying there that it is impossible. That is, that they cannot be deceived. He is saying, "*If it is possible.*" In other words, "*If they open the door to the deception*" then it is possible that they are going to be deceived.

**Matthew 24:25-26** "Behold, I have told you before. Wherefore if they shall say unto you, 'Behold, He is in the desert;' go not forth; 'Behold, He is in the secret chambers;' believe it not."

This **flood of words** is coming out of the serpent's mouth, and its intent is to destroy. But it is aimed not just at the general public. It is mostly aimed at those who know the truth. Do we understand that what I am talking about here fits within the spirit of what Jesus warned the end-time church of right here in what we just read?

It is not merely that the false prophets are claiming to know of Jesus' literal, physical location; but also, what is far more dangerous to us, [it is] talking about His spiritual location. "*Here is the true church over here.*" Or, "*Go over there and you will receive a really good spiritual message.*" "*Look at this church with 100,000 members within it. Surely the truth resides there.*"

It is not talking only about a physical location. We are talking about focusing on where truth may be found. Jesus' warning here is, "Be careful." Christ is the living Word of God personified. He is truth! And in these pressure-packed and wearying times, where can one find Him for the spiritual strength one needs these days? I will tell you—you are not going to find Him in such things as the *Left Behind* series, the *Da Vinci Code*, or the *Passion of the Christ*. Those things were produced to deceive. They were not produced to show people the truth.

**Proverbs 22:3** A prudent man foresees the evil, and hides himself; but the simple pass on, and are punished.

The Israelites never learned their lesson! They were always attracted by the bait that was put out. Maybe it was music—gospel music. I am putting us back thousands of years ago, but I am sure they had their equivalent. Music is an emotional draw. There is a spirit there, and people can be sucked in by it.

Or the bait could be the far more deadly words that come out of the mouth, with cleverness but not with truth. Those productions that I just mentioned are part of the

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flood intended by Satan to sweep Christians away in death. And, brethren, we should expect these presentations to be subtle and attractive because they contain some measure of truth. Otherwise there would be no lure to lead us on. But spiritually—when contrasted to truth—they are nothing but swamps and deserts containing what might be the ultimate dangers to our faith.

I have said before that human nature is an inveterate gambler, always willing to take a risk on the basis of its assumed strength. It was failure to reject the lures of Gnosticism that tripped up so many in the 1<sup>st</sup> century church; and, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, its power remains—seeing it so successfully destroyed the Worldwide Church of God.

Are you aware that it was Gnosticism that destroyed the Worldwide Church of God? It just blew it to smithereens! All you have to do is know the doctrines that caused people to follow, and then trace the origins of those doctrines. God's Word is eternally true! These things are written for the end time church, and they are valid. The Epistles, especially the epistles of Paul, are filled with warnings against Gnosticism. I should add to that also John. Peter has a few mentions. And wait until you look at the book of Jude through eyes educated to understand what he was writing about.

Let us turn to Acts 6:5. Again, think of the context. The church began in Acts 2. So this is just 3 chapters later, or 4 chapters later if we start from the beginning of chapter 2. So it is very early in the church's history.

**Acts 6:5** And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose [as deacons] Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas the proselyte of Antioch.

There are several of those names there that are Greek. None of these people were Greeks though. They were all Jews. But they had Greek names. That gives you an idea of how deeply enmeshed the Jews had become in Greek culture—where they were naming their children with Greek names rather than with Hebrew names.

Especially pay attention to *Nicolas* because available evidence points to him as being the founder of the Nicolaitans of Revelation 2, verses 6 and 15. I will read them, just so that we take them into account.

**Revelation 2:6** But this you have [This is a good point for the Ephesian church], that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

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**Revelation 2:15** [This is a different church era—Pergamos.] So have you also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.

The Nicolaitans were Gnostics. If indeed Nicolas was their leader, you can see that already the seed was ***in the church***—very likely right from the get go. I do not know whether I will mention it to you as we go through it, but there is information that gives us an insight to know that Nicolas was probably one of the 120. That is, that he had already heard Jesus while He was alive. Maybe he was not one of the 120, but he was converted very quickly after that to Christianity.

Now, I want you to notice something. That is, that the Nicolaitans were not called "Gnostics." The Gnostics never called themselves Gnostics. That is a name that the historians and the commentators have given to them. Other people named them after the leader. They considered themselves "Christians." They would identify themselves not as Gnostics but as Christians. They were fellowshiping with the church; but they were carrying with them, in many cases, very strong elements of Gnosticism that they did not get rid of.

If you want a modern example of the same thing: In the Worldwide Church of God, we called ourselves "The Church of God." The members called themselves "The Church of God." They called themselves "Christian." What did the world call the Worldwide Church of God? "Armstrongites." That is exactly the pattern that is repeated here. The Gnostics called themselves Christians but the world named them after their leader. And, incidentally, so did the church name them after their leader.

There is ample historical evidence showing that there were many, many Gnostic groups (even as there are many Protestant groups today). And there is substantial evidence on two of them named in the Bible—the Nicolaitans and the Simonians, who were attached to Simon Magus. Of course, Simon Magus is mentioned in Acts 8. So we know that he too was in there quite early.

Where does this available evidence come from? Up until the last 50 years or so, it all came from the Roman Catholic church fathers. These were men who lived between the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D. They sported names like Clement, Irenaeus, Hippolytus, Tertullian, Origen, and Eusebius. There were others, but these are the major ones.

However, in 1945, in Egypt, the discovery of twelve leather bound books—now called the Nag Hammadi library—containing a wealth of information about the Gnostics was found by a group of workman digging in a fertilizer pit. (It was probably a garbage dump

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at one time. I kid you not.)

Now, if you care to research them, a great deal of material is now found in the Anchor Bible Dictionary. Then, by combining that information with what the Catholic Church fathers wrote, a fairly clear picture begins to emerge.

One of the things that you will find is that all of the Gnostics did not follow exactly the same doctrines. However, there were some doctrines that were consistently believed by all of them. For example: the immortality of the soul. Another would be that we all came from heaven and return there following death. They believed in eternal security, antinomianism, Docetism, and dualism—with the emphasis on the inner spiritual life and the mystical aspects of religion.

I have not mentioned Docetism before, but it has a major consequence on Gnostic morality. Docetism is the belief that Jesus and Christ were two beings in one body. Jesus was the material man, and Christ the spiritual. Docetism is an aspect of the general dualism belief, but it is specifically applied to Christ. This specific aspect proclaims that Christ was pure; but Jesus, though a good man, was not.

They reasoned that, since Jesus was a material man and a Jew, He influenced and thus contaminated some of the ministry and teachings of Christ by His Jewish heritage. Thus, what Christ taught the Jews was not to be fully trusted.

This conclusion supported their antinomian views and thus things like keeping the Sabbath, including both the weekly and the annual. Not only that but, once one was convinced that Docetism was true, it effectively eliminated any statement Christ made in support of any law an individual Gnostic felt too binding on his lifestyle.

I want you to start thinking about how this series got started. I do not want you to begin thinking that the Gnostics were wild living Hedonists. Most of them were not! However, they were victims of a very convoluted and nonsensical-to-us doctrinal system that essentially enabled any Gnostic to pretty much set his own standards, which practice the Barna Report showed is still extant to this day.

Can you remember what that Barna Report said? Evangelical Christians—"born again" people—do not believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, do not believe that He lived a sinless life. I could go on and on here. You remember it, though. Picking and choosing something that they individually feel that they cannot swallow and thus they reject a portion of God's Word, which claims on its own authority that it is true—eternally!



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How can one be a Christian if they reject doctrines out of hand? That is, those doctrines that are part of the truth of God. This is my concern because I see some elements of it in the Church of God. (I am talking about what we see scattered all over the landscape out there.)

When Herbert Armstrong was on the radio, when Evelyn and I were converted, we heard him read this verse (Proverbs 14:12) so many times. I mean it is incredible how many times I heard this verse. It also appears in Proverbs 16:25, but it says:

**Proverbs 14:12** There is a way which seems right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.

We are sort of coming around to Luke 18:9 again, where the Pharisees were those who trusted in themselves. And we find that this same proclivity is alive and well today—in the world especially. They feel free to reject something that you and I look upon as doctrinal truths out of the Bible. They will reject it because they do not feel comfortable with it. But, as Barna himself said, how in the world can you be a Christian like this?

Let us look at this principle regarding Nicolas of Antioch in Acts 6. See if you can figure this one out, and I will help you by giving you a clue. What we are going to begin to see here is the beginning edge of a belief that eliminates the Old Testament as a credible guide. In fact, it leaves people without an authoritative guide to life. Remember that this is part of the Gnostic synergy that became part of "Christianity."

In other words, without an authoritative guide to life, we are talking about antinomianism. It also opens the door devastating to a doctrinal truth and understanding, and to another doctrine of modern Christianity called *dispensationalism*. (Mark that one down. It is devastating!)

A Catholic Church father by the name of Hippolytus, writing against Nicolas, says: "*But Nicolas departed from sound doctrine, and was in the habit of inculcating indifferency of both life and food.*"

Eusebius, also writing of Nicolas, wrote this: "*He had, they say, a beautiful wife; but after the ascension of the savior the apostles accused him of jealousy. So he brought her forward and proclaimed that anyone who wished might have her.*" Now, I am interjecting here, just so that you understand. "Might have her" refers to having sexual relations with her. That ought to tell you something about Nicolas. What man in his right mind would make such a foul proposition?

Continuing the quote of Eusebius: *"This action, they say [that is, the Gnostics say], came from the injunction 'the flesh must be treated with contempt'; and by following this example simply and crudely the members of his sect practice total promiscuity. But I know that Nicholas had nothing to do with any other woman than his wife, and of his children his daughters remained virgins till the end of their days and his son was never corrupted."*

This opens up a door, if you are thinking. We will not go into it. But in I Timothy 4, Paul writes about forbidding to marry and give in marriage, and abstaining from certain foods that God created to be eaten. We find this inference that Nicolas' daughters were virgins for life—an indication that he believed in celibacy; and that his son was never corrupted. Remember that this is Gnosticism.

Another quote, [this time] from Clement of Alexandria, another church father: *"Such being the case, his bringing the wife whom he loved so jealously into the midst of the apostles was the renunciation of desire, and it was mastery of the pleasures so eagerly sought that taught him the rule 'treat the flesh with contempt.' For in obedience to the Savior's command, I imagine, he had no wish to serve two masters...this, that we must fight against the flesh and treat it with contempt, never yielding to it for pleasure's sake, but must nourish the soul through faith and knowledge."*

Let us put these together now. The clue from Hippolytus is the word "indifferency." Look it up in a dictionary, and you probably will not find it. It is just one that they created. Indifferency refers to the common Gnostic belief that one should focus **exclusively**—mind that word "exclusively"—on the inner life of the spirit, which they sharply differentiate from one's material life.

What we are beginning to see the vague outline of is a practical application of *dualism*. This statement that I have just made—the common Gnostic belief that one should focus exclusively on the inner life of the spirit—flies in the face of the Old Testament, which clearly shows that spiritual belief and material conduct **CANNOT** be arbitrarily separated. They go together. And the fruit of this vague belief was outright promiscuity, which both Eusebius and Clement made note of, even though Nicolas himself apparently did not involve himself in these forms of sin.

In order to achieve this level of spirituality that they claimed one should seek after, one must learn to be indifferent to anything one considered "outer" spirituality. And thus armed with this belief, a Gnostic could permit himself to commit adultery or fornication in clear conscience because in his mind what one did in the flesh was of no consequence.

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Their idea was that, if one pursued inner spirituality exclusively, the outer would take care of itself. *Why fight the flesh, brethren? Just go ahead and do what the flesh wants you to do. And if you have the yearning, fill it. It does not matter.* Boy, is that seductive! And so a person can destroy his body—be it with herpes, or with food. *It matters not. It is just flesh.* But God has the right idea. The material and the spiritual cannot be separated!

**Hebrews 5:5-8** So also Christ glorified not Himself to be made an high priest; but He that said unto Him, "You are My Son, today have I begotten You." As He said also in another place, "You are a priest forever after the order of Melchisedec." Who in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications [Notice the way Jesus prayed.] with strong crying and tears unto Him that was able to save Him from death, and was heard in that He feared; though He were a Son, yet learned He obedience.

Did He follow through in the flesh, in obedience? Was He focused exclusively, merely on the spiritual? Certainly He prayed with all of His might for whatever was needed to enable Him to keep the commandments of God. He followed through physically.

**Hebrews 5:9** And being made perfect, He became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him.

Be aware of the contrast between our Savior (the Leader and Founder of the Church of God) and Gnosticism. Jesus certainly took care of the spiritual, but He did not stop there. His life was NOT exclusive to the spiritual. He followed through by obeying perfectly while He lived His material life.

[Gnostics] concluded that inner spirituality is not to be found in material experiences of life, or any rules of conduct that the Bible or any person might use to legislate material conduct. What resulted from these peculiar conclusions was a religion without structure—a religion that had no solid goal, way, or method that would direct and shape daily life. It essentially left people in moral limbo, feeling good for a while because they had a Savior but with nowhere to go and nothing to accomplish.

Now, they did have the goal of going to heaven. That is, of getting back to where they believed that they came from. But since God gives no description of heaven, save that it is glorious because He is there, they had no idea whatever why they were to go to heaven except to look into the face of God and experience eternal bliss. Does that

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sound familiar to you who know anything about those things?

Brethren, our vision of what lies ahead in the Kingdom of God is far superior! It makes one gasp even to dare to think that the great God has considered us and given us this opportunity. And we do need to think often of learning, working, producing, and creating beauty (similar to what we see in God's handiwork in this creation)—and doing it forever! Never tiring. No aches, no pains. Never bored. Always working with others who are kind, encouraging, helpful and cooperative.

But we must be **prepared** for this and **often tested** to determine whether we have the characteristics to work together in a condition like this. Some people cannot, it seems. Some cannot be a cooperating team member for very long before their vanity motivates them to bolt by breaking God's law in some way, thus destroying trust within the team.

God intends for marital partners to be a team. But all too frequently, one or the other feels that they are owed more. And so their vanity drives them to commit adultery or lie. Similarly companies are teams. But employees steal from employers, and employers steal from employees. A man might be employed (perhaps as a salesman) but, instead of truly working for his employer, he is in reality working his own business on the side and stealing customers from his employer. That sort of thing goes on all the time.

Would we think of doing the same sort of thing against God and His Family? God in His mercy is preparing us for working as a team forever, and never breaking trust with anybody within that team. And so we see here:

**Ephesians 2:10** For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God has before ordained that we should walk in them.

First note that we are **His workmanship**. I want to read this to you from the Amplified Bible because they expand it in such a way that it may prove a little bit helpful as I continue to expound on this.

**Ephesians 2:10 (AMP)** For we are God's [own] handiwork (His workmanship), recreated in Christ Jesus...

That is so interesting, because that is what is happening. We are being **recreated**—made over again, but **in Christ Jesus**.

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**Ephesians 2:10 (AMP)** ...that we may do those good works which God predestined (planned beforehand) for us [taking paths which He prepared ahead of time], that we should walk in them [living the good life which He prearranged and made ready for us to live].

We are not ready yet, but that is what we are being prepared for—so that, when the time comes, we will be ready to walk faithfully, all the time, in those paths. The word "working" always implies either new creation or recreation. Every time someone works, one or the other is occurring. In this case, God is the Worker; and He is creating.

Ladies, even if you clean your home, you are creating order. This is why I can say that, every time the word "work" is stated or implied, creation (for good or bad) or recreation (for good or bad) is occurring.

God is working. He is working so that we will *walk* in what He has prearranged as the conduct that He is going to require of His Family. That conduct is the same as He would live if He had to walk. Do you understand what I mean?

Other places supply the details of God's creating. So I am not going to go into any of that because you know what it is. But further, we are the ones being worked on; and we are being created ***within Christ Jesus***. Spiritually, then, this is where the action is taking place.

Further still, this verse specifically states that the purpose of God's workmanship is that we are to do good works that the Creator God has foreordained that we must do. (Please do not get away from what the Gnostic believes, as we are going to tie all of this together in a bit.) It further clarifies that the works are not merely something achieved off in the indeterminate future, but they are to be done in the here and now. We are to walk in them, and that phrase always means right now—in daily life.

And again, every specific of God's workmanship and our responsibilities is not spelled out here; but enough is given to clearly see that the individual Christian's life is to be guided in a specific direction, and that more than grace is involved. Therefore, the Christian must cooperate by doing works commensurate with what God has foreordained so that he is prepared whenever the goal—the destination—is reached.

I am going to read Psalm 119:1 first from the King James Version, and then I am going to read it to you out of the Amplified [Bible] again.

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**Psalm 119:1 (KJV)** Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the LOORD.

Remember again and go back in thought to Ephesians 2:10. Psalm 119 is telling you what that *way* consists of, what those *works* consist of. The way of the LOORD is the law of God.

**Psalm 119:1 (AMP)** BLESSED (HAPPY, fortunate, to be envied) are the undefiled (the upright, truly sincere, and blameless) in the way [of the revealed will of God], who walk (order their conduct and conversation) in the law of the Lord (the whole of God's revealed will).

I chose this chapter—Psalm 119—because it clearly states where much of the **structure** of the Christian religion lies. It lies in the law of God, and it is from the law of God that very much of the guidance for daily life is provided. But there is a perspective of biblical law that we need to be made more aware of, because we have a tendency to think of the law in the narrow sense—as a rule enacted, formally stated, and set by a government in legal terminology.

Now, there is very much of that in the Bible—formally stated and set by the government of God. But in the Bible the overall approach to law is much broader than that, since we are dealing with God who always deals in truth, is infallible in His judgment, knows the end from the beginning, is wise beyond our understanding, and knows exactly where He is headed with His creation and with us individually.

The result of this is that the word "law" is sometimes used in the Bible as a parallel with the term "word of God." And "word" is sometimes used as a parallel with the term "law of God" so that they are synonyms for each other.

This is why I read this out of the Amplified Bible. The translators knew that, and they included it in the first verse. The word "law" is not limited to the Ten Commandments. The word "law" is not limited to the ceremonial law. The word "law" in the Bible means **the whole Book!** So let me read this again from the Amplified:

**Psalm 119:1 (AMP)** BLESSED (HAPPY, fortunate, to be envied) are the undefiled (the upright, truly sincere, and blameless) in the way [of the revealed will of God], who walk (order their conduct and conversation) in the law of the Lord (the whole of God's revealed will).

We are not dealing with a man and his word here. We are dealing with God—the infallible God, eternally truthful. It is impossible for Him to lie. Every aspect of His Word is to be lived by.

Let me carry this thought about *who* it is that we are dealing with and *what* it is that we are dealing with just a little bit further.

**Proverbs 30:5** [Solomon wrote:] Every word of God is pure: He is a shield unto them that put their trust in Him.

**Psalms 12:6** The words of the LORD are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of the earth, purified seven times.

There is what we are to follow. But God does not leave it there. Remember that we are talking about structure. That is, the structure of daily life. The Gnostics really had none. The structure of each Gnostic's life was pretty much left to himself. So he could reject doctrines that he did not feel comfortable with, or that he could not twist around into something that he really and truly believed in.

But the law of God leaves us no "out," and it structures the daily life of a Christian. It gives him a tremendous advantage over the Gnostic in terms of what he is going to do with his life and how righteous he is going to be. And we are not left with just the Word of God. We have examples that we can follow, which we see in the heroes of the Christian religion.

**Genesis 26:5** Because that Abraham obeyed My voice, and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws.

So, here in the Old Testament, it is clearly stated that Abraham—the father of the faithful, the one human being who set the pattern and standard for all who follow him on the path to the Kingdom of God—earned this commendation from God because he did as this verse clearly and emphatically states.

We just saw the commendation that Abraham earned from God. Now let us go to the New Testament and see Jesus, far better than Abraham, who said:

**John 15:10** If you keep My commandments, you shall abide in My love;

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even as I have kept My Father's commandments, and abide in His love.

So along comes Jesus—our God and Creator, Savior, Founder of the church—and He unequivocally states that He kept God's commandments; and He strongly urges us to do the same. He even says that we are to strive, even as He did! We are seeing that the Bible, if it is believed, leaves us with no "out."

**Ecclesiastes 12:13-14** [Solomon wrote:] Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep His commandments: for this is the whole duty of [requirement of; or, even if we leave that out, this is the whole] man. For God shall bring every work into judgment [And what is man going to be judged against? His keeping of the law of God—the commandments.], with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.

In contrast to Gnosticism, there is nothing vague or complicated about true Christianity. The works that we are being created to perform are clearly spelled out, and we are expected to walk in them.

Remember that Jesus said the way is narrow and difficult. He is saying that there is not a lot of wiggle room that allows the Christian to determine the standards of what he is doing—right and wrong. And it is difficult because of human nature, the world, and Satan—which are pulling against the Christian's going that way. But, in terms of doctrine and morality, THE WAY is clearly spelled out for a Christian.

Now, back to Psalm 119 because we are not done here. I want you to notice how many of the verses referring to God's law either implies or clearly states **action** towards some destination, or **guidance** towards that destination. The law is involved in all of this—giving structure to the Christian's life.

We are not going to go to every verse. I am just going to point out a few right at the beginning. Verse 1 uses the term "walk." That is action. Verse 2, "keep" His testimonies—meaning to guard or do. Verse 2 also says, "seek"—more action, meaning hunting for. Verse 3, "do." Verse 5, "ways." Verse 8, again "keep." Verse 9, "cleanse" by means of the law. Verse 10, "sought"—the past tense of keep. And then, jumping all the way to verse 105, where the author says "Your word is a lamp unto my feet"—certainly showing guidance.

So, it is the Gospel combined with the law of God that provides structure to the



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Christian's walk. Gnosticism did not do this, and neither does modern Christianity. This is shown by the fact that, to modern Christianity, keeping the law of God is done away with as a requirement for pleasing God. And so obvious is this deficiency that they even sell Bibles that do not have the Old Testament in it. This is like giving a person only the last 1/3 of a book and telling them to figure out the whole plot and all of its parts for themselves.

That is how Gnosticism gets into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It may not be exactly the same doctrine, but the principle is carried right on through. What is it that makes people think that they are given the right to do this? We already know their antinomian belief. But that belief is linked to a companion doctrine that, if believed, strengthens their already anti-law view. It is the doctrine of *dispensationalism*.

The early Gnostics had a form of this, but it did not really become a strong part of the modern doctrinal picture until it was revived and strengthened by the Protestant reformers—Calvin, Luther, and those people that produced the doctrinal base that we found when we were born. You and I live in Protestant America, and those founders were the founders of Protestantism.

Eventually we are going to get into some of the things that they say, which show conclusively that they were Gnostics. Again, they did not call themselves Gnostics, but the thread of 1<sup>st</sup> century Gnosticism came right through them; and it is alive and wreaking its havoc today.