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**Against Gnosticism: Why the Gnostic Christians were not Christian**

**By Kathy Simcox**

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In early Christianity there were many alternative views that claimed to have authority over one another. Hundreds of rival teachers all claimed to teach the "true doctrine of Christ" and denounced all others as frauds. All claimed to represent "the authentic tradition". Jesus himself was the only authority they all recognized.<sup>1</sup> One of these alternative views was Gnostic Christianity, which gained popularity in the second century.

The term Gnosticism comes from the Greek word gnosis, meaning 'knowledge'. This knowledge is knowledge of participation, knowledge of union and salvation. It is existential knowledge in contrast to scientific knowledge.<sup>2</sup> Gnosticism was influenced by Oriental dualism and Greek philosophies. In this dualism the Gnostics believed that the creation of the world was bad and that its creator, Yahweh, the Old Testament God of the Jews, was an evil being. The God of Gnostic Christianity was a benevolent and loving being, superior over Yahweh.<sup>3</sup> This God was God the Father, Jesus' Father, the "real" God. Paul Tillich said that Gnosis is used in three ways: as knowledge in general terms; as mystical communion; as sexual intercourse.<sup>4</sup> This article will be concerned with the second as it applies to the Resurrection.

The theory that Jesus rose from the dead is the fundamental element of the Christian faith. The idea that this event occurred in one unique historical moment is a central theme to the orthodox position. What makes this so ordinary is not the claim that Jesus' friends had seen him after his death, but that they saw a human being. The orthodox position states that as Christ rose bodily from the grave, so every believer should anticipate the resurrection of the flesh. <sup>4</sup> Some New Testament accounts insist on this literal view of the resurrection and the orthodoxy of the second century insisted on it as well, rejecting all others as heretical. Luke 24:34 states that "the Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon Peter!" Whatever the truth of this claim, in all honesty we can't verify or disprove it on simply historical grounds - we were not there to see it happen. All we can say is that Peter claimed that the resurrection happened and generations after him continued to believe him, and still do.

For the Gnostic Christian, however, the person who experiences the resurrection does not meet Jesus raised back to life in physical form. He encounters Christ on a spiritual level, such as dreams, ecstatic

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trances, visions, and spiritual illumination. 5 The Gnostic Christian rejected Luke's theory. According to them, the literal view of the resurrection was argued to have occurred in the past and because of this it was called the "faith of fools". 6 The Gnostics insisted that the resurrection symbolized how Christ's presence could be experienced in the present. To them, it was not literal seeing that mattered; rather, it was spiritual vision. This spiritual vision of the resurrection, in whatever form it took, was the moment of enlightenment - a person could be "resurrected from the dead" right now. Christians could "receive the resurrection while they live". 7 Gnostics believed that taking the literal view was ignorant.

What interested these Gnostics far more than past events attributed to the "historical Jesus" was the possibility of encountering the risen Christ in the present. They alleged that the risen Christ continued to reveal himself to certain disciples, representing how Christ's presence could be experienced individually in the present moment. For Christians who wanted to know and experience Christ now, in

there own individual present moment, this belief probably seemed like a quick fix. But I beg to differ.

It may be true that Christ's resurrection is central to Christianity, but I want to take it further and say, putting our faith in the occurrence of the resurrection is actually more central than simply stating it happened. Anyone is capable of saying it happened; not everyone is capable of believing it happened. There is significant difference between the two. One requires faith, the other doesn't. Here is where I believe the Gnostics should not be considered Christian. In truth, we were not there two thousand years ago to see the resurrected Christ; the reality of the issue says that we honestly do not know if the event occurred or not. But isn't this what our faith is all about, believing in something not seen? This is why the Christian faith is so beautiful. The mystery of it gives us hope of salvation and eternal paradise. The Gnostic Christians were adamant about experiencing Christ's resurrection in the present moment, as opposed to relying on the belief that it happened in the past, a belief that requires the central theme of Christianity: Faith. If a person experiences something in the present moment, they don't need to have faith that it happened because they were there to experience it. If the Gnostics did not need faith, then I argue against their Christianity, for they did not find use for the essential driving force behind a Christian's whole existence. I believe that the proof of their heresy lies in the fact that Christian Orthodoxy, despite its evolution into many different denominations and doctrines, is still practiced by millions of people, whereas Gnosticism died out long ago. Although people in the modern world did not witness Christ's bodily resurrection they still, two thousand years later, put their faith in the hope that it did. And sometimes, a simple hope is all a person needs.

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About the Author Kathy Simcox, Columbus, Ohio, United States hrdude28@hotmail.com Kathy works as an Administrative Assistant in the College of the Arts at The Ohio State University. She holds a BA in Psychology and is currently working on a second BA in Religious Studies. In addition to writing, her passions include hiking, biking, kayaking, photography, and singing in her Lutheran church choir. She is also known to read an occasional book.

### **Being Hypocritical About A Truth Does Not Invalidate The Truth.**

**By Calvin Kuefer**

Do a Christian's actions change the truth?

Let's say I was standing in front of you smoking a cigarette and said, "Smoking is bad for you! You ought not to smoke."

Will you say to me, "You are a hypocrite and therefore what you are saying must be false. Therefore, smoking must be good for you." That is absurd.

However, rational people will actually say, "Christians are hypocrites and therefore what they are saying must be false. Therefore, there is no God."

That is an error in logic called a non sequitur. It is an inference or conclusion that does not follow from the premises or evidence; a statement that does not follow logically from what preceded it.

Are Christians hypocrites? If a Christian says to you, "You should be like me; a perfect person who does no wrong." Then yes, that Christian is a hypocrite. However, I have yet to hear any Christian, that is, a follower of Christ, make such a statement.

What Christians are most often heard saying is this, "You ought not to sin." And this means different things depending on to whom it's directed.

What an atheist thinks he hears is this: "You are a bad person unlike me who is a good person." If this was what was truly said then hypocrite is a worthy label.

This statement "You ought not to sin", however, is usually, or at least should be, directed only to Christians. When a Christian says, "You ought not to sin", he means: You ought to obey God's laws because He loves you, He knows what's best for you, and because of what He did for you your desire should be to obey Him.

Why would I say that the moral imperative that one "ought not to sin" be directed only towards

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Christians? Because there is no reason to tell an atheist he ought to act according to God's laws. What would be the point? Biblically speaking an atheist's actions, whether moral or immoral, will have the same result: eternal separation from God. So telling an atheist he ought to be good does nothing for his eternal soul.

So while it is understandable to say, "You ought not to sin" to a Christian, to an atheist it would be better to explain to them how Jesus died for our sins and that without Him we are all sinners separated from God.

Are Christians hypocrites? One of the greatest apostles of the Bible writes this,

Rom 7:18,19 "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do."

For followers of Jesus Christ, who understand that man is a fallen and sinful creature, battling the flesh is a moment-by-moment struggle. "We're not perfect, just forgiven" some say.

However, regardless of the actions of those claiming association with God, God and His truth do not change. Malachi 3:6 "For I am the LORD, I change not."

Calvin Kuefer is a part time writer and full time Internet enthusiast. Read more of his writings at

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