

4 Dualistic Teachings That Undermine the Effect of the Gospel

Dualism is a theological focus that inadvertently separates the physical and spiritual realms. It also dissociates heaven from earth. Within this inappropriate viewpoint, the gospel's ability to engage and influence the earth becomes limited.

In the Hebraic mindset of biblical times, the whole world is viewed as sacred and belonging to God (Ps. 24). Both heaven (representing the spiritual realm) and earth (representing the material world) function as a cosmic temple for Yahweh. Hence, the original gospel preached by Jesus and the Jewish apostles was holistic and integrated both heaven and earth. This is why Jesus taught His followers to pray for His kingdom to come on earth as it is in heaven (Luke 11:2-4). The gospel Jesus preached addressed both the spiritual and physical needs of individuals and their surroundings (Luke 4:18-19).

Unfortunately, despite the above rooted, integrative approach, the gospel is often truncated by some believers and others as only addressing spiritual matters; this creates a dualism in which the natural or material world is viewed as insignificant.

The following are four theological perspectives that cause dualism:

1. Hyper premillennial dispensationalism: Dispensationalism is a theological system of interpreting biblical and church history by identifying ages or dispensations in which God moved differently. Some Protestant traditional denominations embrace this framework. The broad emphasis is placed on the distinct periods or ages charting God's interaction with humanity throughout history. (This differs from historic

premillennialism, which doesn't use the same time frame as dispensationalists.)

Within the above framework, hyperdispensationalism expounds a belief in a future 1,000-year reign of Christ on earth, distinct from the current Church Age and the preceding ages. It's worth noting that this eschatological view originated in the early 19th century and is a minority view among serious biblical scholars. It is rightly criticized for potentially leading to a form of dualism and a compartmentalized understanding of Scripture, limiting church focus to only "individual salvation." Adherents believe that the gospel will only positively affect the world during the 1,000-year earthly reign of Christ. This belief includes the perspective that the world will progressively worsen and any attempts to reform it will be a waste of time—similar to rearranging the chairs on the "Titanic.:

2. Semi-Gnosticism: Gnosticism is a term used to describe a variety of religious and philosophical systems that emerged in the early centuries of the Common Era, (A.D.) around the same time as early Christianity. Gnosticism is often considered heretical from the standpoint of orthodox Christianity. It incorporates a dualistic worldview, positing a sharp division between the material and spiritual realms. In Gnostic thought, the material world is often seen as evil or corrupt, created by a lower deity or "demiurge," while the spiritual world is associated with a higher, unknowable God.

Many fundamentalist, Pentecostal and charismatic teachings of the 20th century fell into a form of semi-Gnosticism since they often neglected the Old Testament, and focused exclusively on spiritual gifts, faith and power for healing without a concomitant focus on meeting the physical practical needs of communities for human flourishing.

The apostle John wrote against forms of Gnostic influence in his epistle (John 1:14; 1 John 1:1, 4:2) and the apostle Paul

did as well (Col. 2:8-9,18, 1 Tim. 6:20-21, 2 Tim. 2:16-18). In 1 Timothy 6:20-21, Paul warns against so-called science, which is false. The word science in Greek is the word "gnosis," which is the root of the word Gnosticism, which was still being developed as a major heretical movement against authentic Christianity at that time.

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Early Christian writers like Irenaeus, Tertullian and Hippolytus wrote against Gnostic ideas, arguing that they deviated from the apostolic teachings and the message of the Bible. They criticized Gnosticism for its rejection of the goodness of creation, questioning the God of the Old Testament and its tendency to promote elitism through secret knowledge.

3. Antinomianism: Antinomianism is a term used in Christian theology to describe the belief that Christians are not bound by Mosaic moral or religious laws. The term comes from the Greek words "anti," meaning "against," and "nomos," meaning "law." In this view, the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ is considered sufficient for salvation, making adherence to moral or religious laws unnecessary.

This idea is considered heretical by mainstream Christian thought because it undermines the importance of ethical conduct and the teachings of Jesus and the apostles regarding how one should live. Furthermore, without the law of God, there is no guiding light in which to structure laws and public policies for cities and nations. Thus, Christianity without the law (Antinomian) became irrelevant when nurturing civic leaders capable of crafting a society based on theocentric values. Consequently, without the moral law of Moses as a societal schoolmaster, this expression of Christianity became dualistic, having effectiveness only in the spiritual realm.

4. Hyperpietism: Extreme Pietism in Christian history refers to a form of Pietism that emphasizes personal holiness, inner devotion, and spirituality to exclude social and public responsibilities. Pietism originated as a movement within Lutheranism in the 17th century. It aimed to renew personal faith and piety, but its extreme form led people to disengage from societal issues, public ethics and sometimes even the institutional church. In this view, the focus on personal devotion and spiritual experience was so pronounced that it led to neglect in the following areas:

- Public or communal expressions of faith.
- Social justice concerns.
- Civic duties and broader community involvement.

The critique of extreme Pietism is that it fails to address the public square by keeping faith privatized and individualized, potentially ignoring the biblical calls for communal justice, mercy and responsibility. This form of Pietism is criticized for offering an incomplete, dualistic expression of Christianity, emphasizing “personal spirituality” at the expense of broader social and ethical engagement. {eo}

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