



The Harvester

*Preparing Souls
To Serve The Lord!*

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Attempts to Deny the Godhead (Part 3)

Brian R. Kenyon

Since the Godhead is an often misunderstood concept, the truth concerning it is highly susceptible to being twisted (cf. 2 Pet. 3:16). In this article, we will begin to examine ways in which people have sought to deny the biblical Godhead.

From Biblical Godhead To Human Creeds

A creed may be defined as a “statement of faith for public use; it contains articles needful for salvation and the theological well being of the church” (Cairns, 114). Essentially, creeds were developed as a means to deal with the problems of false teachers within the church. The motives may have been good, but the negative consequences are far reaching.

As the church became more politically oriented, when controversies arose over biblical interpretation, “bishops” and other church leaders were often only concerned about keeping the “unity” of the church. Biblical documents were not very accessible to the common people, and even if they had been, the masses were uneducated. Church leaders, therefore, began to think they were responsible for interpreting the Scriptures for “their church.”

Church leaders thought if they could summarize a concise statement from biblical teaching, church

members would either agree with the statement or not. Those who agreed would be considered members in good standing, and those who disagreed would be considered heretics. Years later, in the Reformation, the “heretics” (from Roman Catholicism’s point of view) started the Protestant denominations based upon their agreement or disagreement with the creeds.

In the next few *Harvesters* will be a brief summary of the main controversies over the biblical Godhead in the early centuries following apostolic times as well as the creeds that resulted from them. This study is limited to those early creeds because they form the basis of all the other major creeds in denominationalism concerning the Godhead.

Gnosticism’s Attack Against the Godhead

By far, Gnosticism was the greatest philosophical threat to early Christianity. Although it did not reach its peak until the middle of the second century, there is evidence of its development in the New Testament (sometimes referred to “incipient Gnosticism”). For example, Paul wrote to the Colossians:

Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the

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world, do you subject yourselves to regulations—²¹Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle, ²²which all concern things which perish with the using—according to the commandments and doctrines of men?

²³These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh. (Col. 2:20-23)

The “do not touch, do not taste, do not handle” was not a reference to cigarettes, but to an early form of asceticism (i.e., denying all bodily appetites because they were essentially evil), which became a major characteristic of Gnosticism.

Also, the apostle John’s emphasis on the real, physical person of Jesus Christ was an inspired response to those who were denying the human nature of the Son of God. Notice the physical senses that John used in describing the reality of Jesus:

That which was from the beginning, which we have *heard*, which we have *seen with our eyes*, which we have *looked upon*, and our *hands have handled*, concerning the Word of life—²the life was manifested, and we have *seen*, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us—³that which we have *seen* and *heard* we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. (1 Jn. 1:1-3, emphasis added, BRK)

Denying the physical person of Jesus Christ was also a major characteristic of Gnosticism.

According to church historian Earle E. Cairns, Gnosticism

sprang from an attempt to explain the origin of evil. Gnostics assumed that all physical matter was associated with evil. They sought a way to create a philosophical system in which God as total spirit could be freed from association with evil and in which humanity could be related on the spiritual side of its nature to deity. They sought to answer great questions surrounding humanity’s origin by combining Christianity and Hellenistic philosophy (96-98).

“Dualism” was one of their main tenets. They insisted upon a distinct separation of the material world (which was evil) and the spiritual world (which was good). Because all matter was evil to them, God could not have been the Creator of this material world. The gap existing between a good spiritual God and the evil material world was bridged by the idea of a demiurge. A demiurge was one of a “series of emanations from the high god of Gnosticism” (Cairns, 96). As these “emanations” came from the totally spiritual God, the resultant beings became less of a spirit and increasingly more material. The demiurge being had enough spirit to have creative power, yet this being had enough matter in it to create the evil material world. This demiurge was identified with Jehovah of the Old Testament, whom the Gnostics disliked.

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“Docetism” (from a word that means “to seem”) was the doctrine they developed to explain Christ. Because all matter was to be associated with evil, Christ as an absolute spirit could not have been associated with a human body because, according to them, all matter, including flesh and blood, is evil. Either the man Jesus was a phantom, only with the *appearance* of a material body, or the Christ-spirit only came upon the human, material body of Jesus for a short time. Thus, the idea arose that the Christ-spirit came upon the body of Jesus at His baptism, and the Christ-spirit departed from the body of Jesus, when on the cross He cried, “Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit” (Lk. 23:46). According to Gnosticism, it was the task of Christ to teach a special *gnosis* (knowledge) that would help people save themselves by an intellectual process.

Salvation, which was only for the spiritual part of humans, required special knowledge (*gnosis*), which Christ only imparted to the initiated. Since the body was material and destined to be cast off, it might be kept under by strict ascetic practices (which deny all bodily desires) or be given over to “libertinism” (complete freedom to do anything a person desires). There was no place for the bodily resurrection according to Gnosticism. Additionally, the Lord’s Supper was not observed because it involved fruit of the vine and bread (Mt. 26:26-29), which were considered evil because they were material.

Irenaeus’ *Against Heresies* (ca. 180) reveals that there were many groups of Gnosticism and that their doctrines sometimes varied. Marcion and his follow-

ers seem to have been the most influential group of Gnostics. According to Cairns, Marcion left his native home of Pontus (ca. 140) for Rome, where he became influential in the Roman church. He thought that Judaism was evil and, therefore, he hated the Old Testament and the God (Yahweh) described in it. He set up his own canon of Scripture, which included a shortened Gospel of Luke and ten epistles of Paul. Marcion founded his own church after being expelled from the Roman church. His church held to a Gnostic dualism that rejected the God of the Old Testament for a God of love revealed in Jesus.

Gnosticism was (and is) a damnable doctrine because, among other reasons, it attacked the true nature of the Triune God of the Bible. It placed two gods in complete opposition to one another: the evil “God” of the Old Testament to create the material world, and the good “God” of the New Testament to redeem people living in the material world. Also, it rejected Christ’s humanity, sacrificial death, and bodily resurrection, all of which strike at the very nature of Jesus, who at his birth was called “Immanuel, which is translated, God with us” (Mt. 1:23). Gnosticism did, however, contribute to the early church in a positive way; namely, it forced the church to give attention to what writings actually came from God and were, thus authoritative and worth defending, even unto the death.

In the next Harvester, we will examine other early attacks against the biblical Godhead, including the early controversies that led to various councils’ creedal statements.

Honduras Medical (& Evangelism) Campaign

FSOP staff, Phoebe group members, and supporters were blessed to participate, with Latin American Missions, on a campaign to Honduras July 4-11, 2026. In addition to the 1,029 people who received medical attention, this work resulted in 279 Bible studies, fifteen baptisms, and two restorations.



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Fall Registration: July 14 - August 14 at fsop.net

Fall 2026 Semester Begins Aug. 3rd

Registration opens July 14 at fsop.net. Any of these classes may be taken online for credit or to audit. Contact the office for more details.

Day	Time	Lakeland Classes	Instructor	Credit
Monday	___ 8:30-12:00	I & II Thessalonians & Galatians (137)	Bauer	3
	___ 1:00-4:15	Hermeneutics (100)	Beals	3
Tuesday	___ 8:30-12:00	Preacher & His Work (107)	Wheeler	3
	___ 8:30-12:00	English I - Grammar (124)	Kenyon	3
	___ 1:00-4:15	World Religions (275)	Wheeler	3
Wednesday	___ 8:30-12:00	Sermon Prep & Delivery (203)	Bauer	3
	___ 8:30-12:00	Greek I (124)	Kenyon	3
	___ 1:00-4:15	Minor Prophets (246)	Kenyon	3
Thursday	___ 8:30-12:00	Old Testament History (239)	Ridgeway	3
	___ 1:00-4:15	Life of Paul (262)	Ford	3
Friday	___ 8:30-12:00	Hebrews (210)	McDonald	3
	___ 1:00-4:15	Ezekiel & Daniel (214)	D. Stearsman	3
Extension Classes				
Thursday	___ 7:00-9:30	TBA (Hosted by Wesconnett church of Christ, Jacksonville)	TBA	2.5
Thursday	___ 6:00-8:30	Acts (118) (Hosted by Tenth Street church of Christ, Apopka)	Kenyon	2.5

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