

Beware of the Gnostics

by David E. Thiele

One of the warnings found in the New Testament is found in I Timothy 6:20, "O Timothy! Guard what was committed to your trust, avoiding the profane *and* idle babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge--" (NKJV) Basically Paul warns Timothy to watch out for those claiming to have special knowledge. We can look back in history from our vantage point and view that as an interesting footnote, or we can realize there is a principle there that we should heed even today. Is there a modern day Gnosticism? Are there people today claiming to have special knowledge? I remember reading a book called "Think and Grow Rich" many years ago, and one of the things it touted was that knowledge was power. There is some truth to that. The question is if you have that power will you use it or abuse it?

I believe that there are those in Christendom that claim to have special knowledge. They use that position of power and authority to lord it over others. Is it Biblical? Definitely not! Does it continue even to this day? Definitely yes! It is easily recognized in religious organizations that have developed their own caste system. They may have "Priests", "Bishops", "Archbishops" and so on. Most of us would agree that they take unto themselves authority not granted to them in the scriptures.

The question is in the Christian community do we have the same problem? Are there people claiming special knowledge and using that to usurp authority to lord it over others. I believe there are. We have created an artificial division between so called "Clergy" and "Laity". The scriptural basis for doing so is a real stretch of the imagination to say the least.

While it is true that the Bible does state some people who work hard at preaching and teaching are worthy of double honor, it is contrary to other passages to elevate them to a special class. In example, while it's true we should respect and honor our elders, that doesn't mean by virtue of age an older person is better than a younger one. The elderly just have the benefit of having had more experience. As one retired missionary explained it to me, "We've just had more time to make more mistakes – and we learn from our mistakes".

Yet somehow in the Christian church we have bought into the idea that through training and education some people are now in an elite class of Christians that have the right to lord it over those less educated than themselves. They often do it through intimidation. Yes, the Bible does talk about submitting to those that have the rule over you, but it also talks about those in positions of authority being servants of all.

Think of it this way. In the business model we have the head of the company (President, CEO) and under him vice-president(s). Then come managers, supervisors, lead-persons, and finally the workers. This seems to work well in the world of business. It is an authoritarian approach that capitalizes on fear. Do the job I have instructed you to do or get demoted, laid-off, or fired! In the Christian world we've bought into this idea. Whatever works for business should work for the church.

Here is what I propose. If the Bible is true (and it is) and it says, "Whoever would be first among you, let him become the servant of all", then we have the pyramid upside down. Those that have responsibility over others are to see that those above them (below in the business model) have everything they need to perform their job well. It could be training, tools, etc. There is still a dependency, but now it develops a relationship based on caring, loving provision instead of authoritarian fear. Now that would be Biblical. Try it and let me know how it works at your church.