

The Gnostic and the Pistic

I sat at the fellowship table somber and reserved. A preacher friend looked at me and said, "You know in the final analysis, men are either Gnostics or Pistics. I am a Pistic. What are you?" The question jarred me from my reverie. "I am a Pistic, too," I answered in a flash. The words came out before I even thought. I knew their meaning, but I had never considered how two Christians could sit at a single table completely dependent on different sources for their spiritual life.

He was right of course. Once you get past the existentialists, modernists, theistic evolutionists, and the rest of those who have reduced the Gospel to theories, Gnostic Christianity and Pistic Christianity are all there is left. A Gnostic bases his life on what he knows; "I know therefore I am." The Pistic bases his life on what he believes; "I believe therefore I am." The first bases his or her life on the amassing of Christian knowledge; the second bases his or her life on the amassing of Christian faith.

Our world today is fast becoming inundated with greater and greater numbers of Gnostic Christians while Pistics are fewer and fewer. Amassing belief is not nearly as attractive as learning something. After all, faith is invisible. A body of research, on the other hand, has intellectual weight; it feels fat.

The need to feel filled, especially in third wave Christianity, has fostered scores of theologians explaining justification, regeneration, reconciliation, eschatology and the like. New theologies and interpretations arise faster than religious magazines can report them. The revelator of each claims to be endowed by His creator with some special inalienable right of grace that empowers him to see beyond everyone else. Crowds, like the Athenians, run to hear some new thing. The opportunity for these snake oil salesmen to operate is based on a growing number of Gnostic Christians for whom old-fashioned faith in eternal life is not enough. They must be told something new. They need it to hold on to something. A little of what is being said is excellent. Most is refried beans. A dangerous final portion is pure heresy.

The basic, honest craving to know more of God is wonderful. But it is being replaced with a desire for knowledge for other reasons. Knowledge in itself, of course, is right and good. But knowledge for the sake of knowledge, power, authority or the subservience of others is knowledge for the WRONG reason. It is at the motive level that this subtle change occurs.

Those in this category are easy to spot. They seek out teachers because their ears itch for more. It is not the itch or the scratching of it that is the problem. It is that after the knowledge has been amassed it does not send the individual to their knees in prayer. It does not lead to soul winning. It does not edify

the church. It does not produce workers. It produces thinkers for whom the process of spiritual discussion is a religious experience. "Let's share what we've learned," is the mantra of everything from self-awareness workshops, to real estate training, to church seminars. There is even a wave of new books out on getting people to come to church for coffee klatches by discussing some Christian issue.

These people never realize that their processing of information is not leading to any production of Christian service. Instead the emotions become bloated with a spiritual superiority because these know more than the saint beside them. Somehow they are now better, smarter, and farther down the road than the rest of the flock. Smarter - maybe; better and further down the road - No! Sometimes it even causes its adherents to forget rudiments like church attendance, tithing, prayer, fellowship, etc. Rudimentary failure places them behind even the most fledging of saints. Of course, they are unaware of all this because they are caught in their heady swirl of revelatory information. Read my words: if what you have learned has erased the rudiments it's either heresy or you learned it for the wrong reason!

It is at this juncture that the greater destroys the lesser. The individual by ranking themselves above the flock now avoids the rules for the flock. There are no bonus points for intelligence in the Word of God.

Gnostics find their security in knowledge. The more they know, the safer they feel. Of course, real safety is only found by placing our trust in Him. That makes it an issue of faith, not knowledge. But belief without information is too vacuous a religion for the Gnostic. These people must deal in tangible books, tapes, lessons, bodies of knowledge, etc. Mere invisible, incorporeal faith is just too intangible. Yet, these poor unfortunates can never say, "I have a problem believing without seeing."

These people sometimes seek titles, credentials, certificates and degrees to prove to themselves that they are ahead of the flock. On the basis of this paperwork they make sure the flock knows that they are advanced. They are prone to flaunt any distinction they may carry as proof of their superiority. They are unable to see that the need to use the distinction to the flock is proof that whatever the Holy Spirit has made them is insufficient. There is no place in the New Testament where any of the founders of our faith gave themselves any title but that which the Holy Spirit had already bestowed.

In the final analysis men and women bring worth to titles, certificates and degrees; the papers do not make them. The M.D. who cannot bring diagnostic/prescriptive prowess to his job is not even a good orderly. The need to bring papers along to prove to the flock that we are shepherds is the verification that we are not. Sheep know voices, not papers.

It is this very upside down approach to the Kingdom of God that is killing our churches and fellowships. When Gnostics have a piece of paper they are important. The Gnostics among groups must be heard; after all everything they say or think is brighter, higher, smarter or wiser than anyone else in the flock. The road to hell is still paved with good ideas that the Holy Ghost never suggested.

Often these people become wanderers going from church to church looking for a place to be important rather than serviceable. They must impart. Even if what God gave them was for their personal growth, they feel compelled to elucidate, extrapolate and elongate.

Gnostics and Pistics get high on different things. To a Gnostic ideas and revelations are the outworking of God. To the Pistic miracles and wonders are the outworking of God. When a fresh idea comes along the Gnostic not only wants to discuss it, he or she wants to study it, develop it and make tangential probes from it. The Pistic rejoices when a season of miracles begins. The Pistic hopes that corporate faith is increased and that many others believe and find their own wonders.

Gnostic pastors are easy to spot. They believe that the imputation of knowledge IS the service. People should go home smarter. Nonsense! Read my words! People should go home better. That better may include healing, strength, fellowship, prayer, the impartation of spiritual gifts, the removing of condemning spirits as well as a greater knowledge of the most holy. Knowledge about Him is NOT knowledge of HIM. How far He walked is superficial information compared to how he walked among mankind.

No one ever says, "I'm smarter. Therefore the devil will bother me less." The devil stays away from those strong in faith not those who have learned the most. Our universities are full of educated fools because they cannot understand the whole purpose of the amassing of knowledge is that we might better communicate Jesus to others. The physician learns not so he will astonish but to meet a human need. If what is in his head does not get in his hands, he is a failure as a healer. But Gnostics use knowledge not to aid but to separate themselves from human need. When knowledge causes us to avoid our responsibilities to hurting humanity, it is the worst form of spiritual elitism.

The Gnostic may hold the deed to the farm in his hands, but the Pistic holds the dirt of the farm between his fingers. The first stands smugly in the knowledge that a transaction has been made; the second kneels hopefully in faith for a crop. Holding a deed is not holding the property; it is only holding the legal record of a transaction. The man holding the dirt has the farm between his fingers. It is the man in the sod that turns a legal transaction into a physical transformation.

There is a great danger to a Gnostic Christianity. Since Gnostics know how God works, how He acts and how to get what they want from him, when the Sovereign doesn't do what they want, their religion falls apart. The pistic just keeps on believing. When the Gnostic doesn't get what he or she wants, the Sovereign's failure appears to be a refuting of the gnostic's knowledge. Many Gnostics become disillusioned, depressed, anxious or backslidden. After all the Sovereign must prove nothing to the Pistic. God must prove and reinforce the Gnostic's revelation in order to validate and maintain their superiority. Nothing shakes a Gnostic like God going behind a cloud right after they have explained just how He must work. Pistics have no such problem because God behind a cloud or smiling in the sun is still their God.

Ironically, the name it and claim it movement in America is very much a Gnostic movement. The proponents explain to their followers how to bend God to human desires at every whim. Their mantra is, "I know how and I will use faith to get what I want." In this way faith is made the scapegoat for knowledge unfulfilled. And when their formula doesn't work, it is not faulty knowledge but faulty faith that is blamed for the failure. Followers are led on by promises of wealth, healing, and prosperity. If they don't get what they want, no one ever questions the knowledge. A lack of faith is always the problem. No one seems to realize that faith is not knowledge's stepchild. Faith is never the Cinderella left home from the ball so the ugly sisters may attend; faith is the queen-mother herself.

Psychologically Gnostics are drawn toward the movement by their feelings of inferiority. Often they reach for knowledge in order to establish par with others. But Gnostics never admit that it is their own inferiority that drove them to seek reams of knowledge at the expense of mountains of faith. Nor do they see that, those who can, do; those who can't keep studying!

Let us be clear that this is not an argument for ignorance, it is an argument for knowledge based on the operation of faith. As such, it is experiential not theoretical. Pistics simply believe that their God is big enough to teach them as they do what He says. Jesus was clear that He only did what He saw His Father do. In the same way today's pistic does what the Lord tells him to do. The Gnostic analyses the effort from the intellectual high ground a safe distance from the dangers of failure, disgrace, or embarrassment. Yet it is the pistic who is getting the human job done. The Gnostic can only observe, critique and add commentary. Moses, the pistic, holds out his rod over the Red Sea doing exactly what God told him to do. In the background some Gnostic is saying, "Yes he's holding it correctly."

Gnostics are built up by the hearing and retention of ideas. Pistics are built up by hearing the Word of God. All Scripture builds Pistics. Only new interpretations of Scripture build Gnostics. Isn't it funny that Jesus upbraided his disciples repeatedly for their 'little faith' but said much less about their lack of knowledge?

The Gnostic goes on truth hunts without orders to find. After all his life is tied up in searching out. The Pistic waits for orders from the Master and then goes by faith that he will learn the thing he is supposed to. He doesn't want to learn the right thing at the wrong time, attack out of season, or offend a little one by his meat. The Gnostic never considers these issues. If he can find it, he wants it now! There is a certain distrust of the sovereignty of God built into Gnostic Christianity though most Gnostics would never admit it.

The Pistic lives on, "He will perfect that which concerneth me." He trusts that the initiatives Jesus sends Him on are the exact ones he needs. He also trusts that he will learn the lesson. He trusts that if he doesn't the Lord will run him through it again. The Gnostic, however, isn't even on the same page. The source of his truth search has arisen from his personal taste in meat. He often finds himself whole continents away from where the manna is falling but it doesn't matter because he is his own nutritionist and the chef of his own diet.

How in the world did we get in such sorry shape? Consider the following verse--"When He the spirit of truth is come he will guide you into all truth."

We have replaced the preeminence of the Spirit of God with a search for truth alone. We have failed to realize that truth does not produce Spirit. Alone, truth can only make us thirsty for more of the same. It can never fill us up. Knowledge, even when it is pure truth, cannot bring us into a relationship with God. However, a relationship with the Spirit of God will bring us into ALL truth. Spirit produces truth but truth alone won't produce the Holy Spirit. We have gone to the wrong well to try and never thirst again.

It is by faith that we seek the Spirit of God believing He will show us the truth. The poor Gnostic is still drinking at Jacob's well. The more he drinks the thirstier he is. He has become hooked on the process of getting a drink. He is addicted to both the process and the product. He cannot stop long enough to realize he is never satisfied. All the while the Master is asking us to receive the Spirit of God by faith and truth will follow.

Remember the poor harlot who came to the well. She had a faulty knowledge system. She thought there was none greater than Jacob or his water. Jesus told her she had been drinking at the wrong well. She asked for water from His well (an act of faith). He gave her drink. Suddenly she understood he was a prophet. On the way back to the city she realized he was the Christ. By the time she got to the gate she knew everyone should know as well. He the Spirit of Truth had come. She drank of that Spirit. She was overwhelmed with the truth! What an explosion of knowledge from a single drink! She didn't go to the well seeking new water. He the Spirit of Truth was waiting at her well because it was time.

Faith is not some far-removed star that we wish on when we don't know the answers. Faith is the wheel within a wheel that moves all the powers of the heavens. Faith is the very axle on which all of God's programs revolve. It is the hub of God's gearbox and all His power emanates from its attachment to faith! Hook all the belts and chains you want to knowledge, and it is impotent to move things one inch. Whoever said 'knowledge is power' didn't understand God's economy.

The Pistic bases his life on hearing the Word of God, even if he has heard it before. Repetition is death to the Gnostic. It is life to the pistic. His or her faith is completely in something outside of himself and made by God.

The greatest problem with Gnostic Christianity is in how it is verified. Since the Gnostic bases his life on what he or she knows, the proof of his religion is in his brain. Everything that is accepted is done inside of a previously built mental framework. He fits new knowledge into previously learned paradigms, templates, even clichés. But God is past finding out and the premise that we can fit His ways into our brain is faulty. God was only ever housed in one piece of flesh and they called Him Jesus.

Job said, "Though he slay me yet will I trust him" - those are the words of a pistic! God's Old Testament example of perseverance says to us, "I got through it by faith!" Those words leave us to know if we will make it through to the end it will be because we chose to serve Him by faith. The Gnostic will be devoured by the storm every time. The shores of Christianity are littered with the carcasses of Gnostic Christians who could only hang on as long as they understood. When our Christianity gets beyond our understanding the man holding the faith rope is the fellow you will see on the other side of the storm.

Fellowship time was about over. The preacher put his hand on my shoulder as he walked away from the table. "I hope you find what you are looking for, " he said. "I did," I said, "I am a Pistic!"

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