

# Salvation Through Gnosis?

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There is a misconception, among some religious people, that knowledge pertaining to certain spiritual truths is a prerequisite to inheriting everlasting life. In fact, some early Christian sects valued inquiry into these spiritual truths above faith, and believed that salvation depended on understanding these “spiritual mysteries” correctly. These groups are known as Gnostics.

This same reasoning process can gradually enter into any religious organization. When this occurs it can lead to exclusivism, arrogance, misinformation, and even various forms of physical or emotional abuse. The environment created by this form of reasoning quenches the love of Almighty God. At the root of this problem is the misconception that knowledge about spiritual matters comes by human effort, or some form of favoritism shown by a spiritual power. As Almighty God is not a “respector of persons,” He does not show favoritism toward one person over another. He may work with them in different ways, but they are considered equal in His sight. Hence, the half shekel that was given on the Day of Atonement by every citizen, regardless of their status in society (Ex. 30:13-15),

Then Peter opened his mouth and said: ‘In truth I perceive that **God shows no partiality**’ (Ac. 10:34; cf. Dt. 10:17; NKJV used throughout unless otherwise noted; emphasis added).

God extends His mercy to every sinner, but at different times. If He chooses to withhold His mercy for a period of time, that is His prerogative,

For He (Almighty God) says to Moses, ‘I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion’ (Rom. 9:15; Ed. note in parenthesis).

For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, ‘Even for this same purpose I have raised you up, that I might show My power in you, and that My name might be declared in all the earth’ (Rom. 9:17).

Therefore, it is erroneous to conclude that Almighty God shows favoritism to one person over another, or one religious group over another. In fact, it is those who believe they understand God’s truth more accurately that are in greater danger of deception from the Adversary (1Pet. 5:8),

Therefore let him who thinks he stands (in the correct understanding of God’s word) take heed lest he fall (1Cor. 10:12; Ed. note in parenthesis).

Even those who do understand a great deal about God’s word are still deceived about some aspects of God’s truth because no human being knows everything about Almighty God,

For now we (God’s people) see in a mirror, dimly, but then (at a future resurrection) face to face.

**Now I (Paul) know in part**, but then I shall know (much more accurately) just as I also am known (1Cor. 13:12; cf. Rev. 12:9; Ed. notes in parentheses; emphasis added).

Through a series of examples, God confirms that His truth can only be understood when He gives it to an individual through the power of His Holy Spirit. Whether that individual retains any truth that God imparts to him/her depends on whether they willingly seek to obey His word (Mt. 4:4),

And we (Christ's disciples) are his (Christ's) witnesses to these things, and so also is **the Holy Spirit** (of Almighty God) **which God has given to those who obey Him** (Ac. 5:32; Ed. notes in parentheses; emphasis added).

The following is an example of someone receiving a specific truth directly from Almighty God through the power of His Holy Spirit,

He (Christ) said to them (his twelve disciples), 'But who do you say that I am?' <sup>16</sup> And Simon Peter answered and said, 'You are the Christ (Messiah), the Son of the living God (Almighty).' <sup>17</sup> Jesus answered and said to him, 'Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for **flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven**' (Mt. 16:15-17; Ed. notes in parentheses; emphasis added).

Some could use this example to claim that God intended Peter to be the chief apostle because God revealed this truth to him while the other disciples did not comprehend it until later. However, this position is contradicted by the fact that Christ revealed a very important truth to the apostle Paul approximately three years before Peter understood it. That truth had to do with the fact that the Gentile nations would now have salvation available to them primarily because the Jewish leadership rejected Christ as predicted by God's prophets during the time of the First Covenant (Isa. 42:6; 49:6),

But the Lord (Christ) said to him (Ananias), 'Go for **he (Paul) is a chosen vessel of mine to bear my name before Gentiles**, kings, and the children (sons) of Israel (10 tribes that were not located in Judea) (Ac. 9:15; Ed. notes in parenthesis; emphasis added).

This statement was made approximately in 36–37 CE, which was three years before Peter had the vision of the unclean animals (39–40 CE). Through this vision, God taught Peter that the Gentiles were no longer considered unclean, "spiritually-speaking" (cf. Ac. 10:1-48). Some might argue that God intended Paul to teach salvation to the Gentiles, but Paul did not realize it at this precise point in his life. However, this position is contradicted by other scriptures showing Paul knew this was his commission at exactly that point in time,

So I (Paul) said, 'what shall I do Lord?' And the Lord said to me, 'Arise and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all things which are appointed for you to do' (Ac. 22:10; Ed. note in parenthesis).

Then he (Christ) said to me (Paul), 'Depart, for **I will send you far from here to the Gentiles**' (Ac. 22:21; Ed. notes in parentheses; emphasis added).

As a second witness to this fact, Paul recounted this same sequence many years later to King Agrippa,

At midday, O king (Agrippa), along the road (to Damascus) I (Paul) saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and those who journeyed with me. <sup>14</sup> And when we all had fallen to the ground, I heard a voice speaking to me and saying in the Hebrew language, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me (Christ)? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.' <sup>15</sup> So I said, 'Who are you, Lord?' And he said, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.' <sup>16</sup> But rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you. <sup>17</sup> I will deliver (rescue) you from the Jewish people, as well as **from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you'** (Ac. 26:13-16; Ed. notes in parentheses; emphasis added).

Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, <sup>20</sup> but declared first to those in Damascus and in Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judea, and **then to the Gentiles, that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance** (Ac. 26:19-20; emphasis added).

Although an important truth was revealed to Peter during the time of Christ's earthly ministry, a different but equally important truth was revealed to Paul following Christ's death and resurrection. Therefore, neither Peter nor Paul could claim any preeminence based on favoritism shown to either one of them. Again, God will reveal certain truths to whomever He wishes, when He wishes, and in whatever manner He wishes. Consequently, Peter was not even aware that Paul already knew the Gentiles would now be accepted into the household of God. Instead, he thought he was the first apostle to realize this truth,

And when there had been much dispute, Peter rose up and said to them: 'Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe (Ac. 15:7; cf. 10:1-48).

Apparently, there had not been much communication between Peter and Paul regarding the Gentiles until the Jerusalem council when the matter of circumcision was discussed. It was at this point that Paul confirmed the miracles God had performed as a witness to the Gentiles,

Then all the multitude kept silent and listened to Barnabas and Paul declaring how many miracles and wonders God had worked through them among the Gentiles (Ac. 15:12).

Although Peter had been shown that the Gentiles could now be part of God's household, he still had some difficulty fully embracing this truth. In fact, Paul had to correct him following the Jerusalem council because of his duplicity regarding the Gentiles. This example is important because it reinforces the fact that spiritual knowledge is of no value unless it changes someone's life for the better,

But when Peter had come to Antioch, I (Paul) withstood (opposed) him to his face, because he was to be blamed; <sup>12</sup> for before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they (the Jews) came, he withdrew and separated himself (from the Gentiles), fearing those who were of the circumcision (Jewish Christians who believed Gentile converts should be circumcised; cf. Gal. 2:2-4). <sup>13</sup> And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy. <sup>14</sup> But when I (Paul) saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter before them all, 'If you being a Jew, live in the manner of Gentiles and not as the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews (regarding circumcision which Paul describes as one of the works of God's law associated with the sacrificial system that Christ's death fulfilled; cf. Mt. 5:17) (Gal. 2:11-14; Ed. notes in

parenthesis).

Therefore gnosis, or knowledge, about spiritual truths bestows no benefit on anyone unless it transforms an individual for the better. This is why Paul stated the following,

And **though I** have the gift of prophecy, and **understand all mysteries and all knowledge**, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, **but have not love, I am nothing** (1Cor. 13:2; emphasis added).

So God can reveal certain truths to individuals, but that knowledge is no guarantee they are going to be transformed by it. Instead, some use this information to build their reputation, and position within a community, rather than change the way they live and relate to others. The following is an example of this. Simon, who was baptized by Philip, understood certain truths about God's way of life, but this knowledge did not change him for the better,

Now when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostle's hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them (Peter and John) money (Ac. 8:18; Ed. note in parenthesis).

But Peter said to him (Simon), 'Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money!' (Ac. 8:20).

Although Simon had some knowledge about God's way of life, it did not transform him because this knowledge was not combined with a deep desire to obey the law and commandments of Almighty God. Therefore, gnosis of and by itself has little value,

The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul (one's life)... (Ps. 19:7a; Ed. note in parenthesis).

To summarize so far, no one can understand God's truth unless Almighty God reveals it to them. Therefore, no one can take credit for discovering spiritual truths through their own supposed talents or abilities. As Almighty God reveals His truth at different times, and in different ways, to different people, no one should think they are being treated in a preferential manner. In reality, everyone will eventually understand God's truth as the following scripture confirms,

No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for **they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest** of them, says the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more (Jer. 31:34; emphasis added).

Until this prophecy is fulfilled, God expects His people to teach His way of life to others in a manner that reflects His love, kindness, patience, and mercy. Because it is rare for two or more people to understand some aspect of God's truth at exactly the same time, or in the same manner, brethren are to be patient with one another, allowing time for each church member to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ. As discussed previously, Paul knew the Gentiles were now able to repent and be baptized into the Body of Christ, while Peter learned this truth approximately three years later. During the Jerusalem council, Peter thought he was to preach to the Gentiles, while Paul knew it was his commission. Throughout this learning process Paul and Barnabas exhibited patience toward the other apostles of Christ,

But from those who seemed to be something (some of Christ's original disciples) – whatever they were, it makes no difference to me (Paul); God shows personal favoritism to no man – for those who seemed to be something (in the eyes of men) added nothing to me.<sup>7</sup> But on the contrary, **when they saw that the gospel for the uncircumcised had been committed to me**, as the gospel for the circumcised was to Peter<sup>8</sup> (**for He who worked effectively in Peter for the apostleship to the circumcised also worked effectively in me toward the Gentiles**),<sup>9</sup> and when James, Peter, and John, who seemed to be pillars (in the eyes of men), perceived the grace that had been given to me, **they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship** (finally Barnabas and Paul were no longer marginalized), **that we should go to the Gentiles** and they to the circumcised (the Jews) (Gal. 2:6-9; Ed. notes in parentheses; emphasis added).

Hypothetically if Peter died, prior to learning that the Gentiles now had the potential to be members of God's household, would this prevent him from entering the Kingdom of God? If anyone were to answer "yes", they would probably subscribe to the theory of "salvation through gnosis." However, that is not correct. Peter would still be in God's Kingdom based on his obedience to the truth he had received until the day of his death. Consequently any of God's truths, that Peter had no knowledge of during his physical lifetime, would be revealed to him following his resurrection from the dead. So "growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ" is progressive and will continue into the resurrection from the dead, which commences with the return of Jesus Christ (Jn. 11:25).

This document is the collaborative work of individuals who believe God's truth should be given freely (Mt. 10:8; 1Cor. 2:12; 2Cor. 11:7; Rom. 10:14-21) and the message of the one true God should be made available to all nations (Mt. 24:14) as a prerequisite to the return of Jesus Christ as King of kings (Mt. 17:10; 19:17; Mk. 9:11; Lk. 1:17; Rev. 19:11-16).

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