

GNOSTICISM AND THE BOOK OF COLOSSIANS

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1. Dualism
 - spirit = good
 - matter = evil

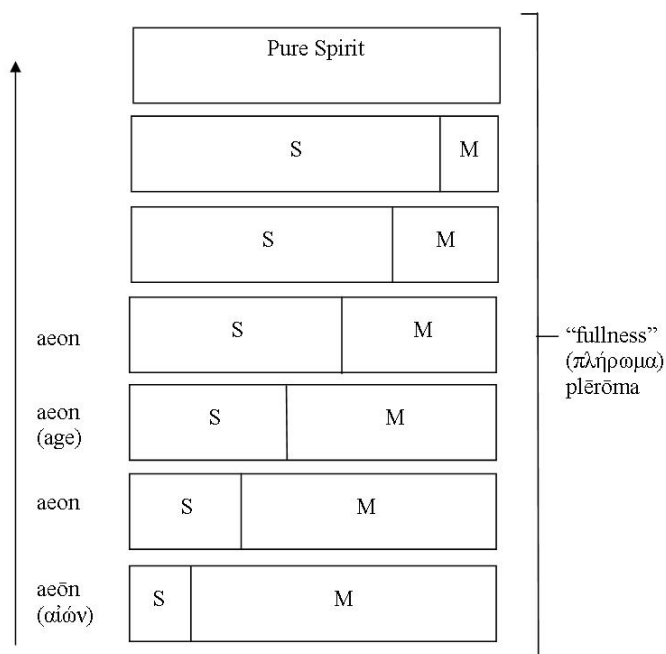
Evil/sin was defined as a kind of being/
“stuff” rather than a way of acting.

2. Mankind is a mixture of spirit and matter and therefore of good and evil.

Two attitudes toward the flesh were then adopted: asceticism, which deprived the flesh; and hedonism, which satiated the flesh.

3. Salvation became the task of “unmixing” the the evil and good in man by unmixing the spirit and the flesh (matter). This process was accomplished by knowing the secret information that certain ones claimed to know so that a human being could move into higher realms that had progressively higher proportions of spirit to matter until the realm of pure spirit was entered.

In Christianity the task is overcoming separation between persons and other undesirable effects by overcoming the effect of past evil actions and by changing such actions into good ones. The change occurs by acting—specifically repentance and forgiveness and commitment to changed behavior.



When Gnostic thought tried to mix Christianity into its scheme of things, it made Jesus the ruler (ἄρχων; 1:16, 18) of one of the realms, or *aeons*, within the full *pleroma*. Another aberration was that morality ceased to be a “theological” concern since state of being rather than manner of behavior became the issue.

What Paul does in imaging the gospel in the functional equivalents of Gnosticism includes the use of *mystery* (μυστήριον). According to Paul, the real mystery was that Gentiles as Gentiles have access to fellowship with God through Jesus Christ (**1:26-27**; **2:2**; **4:3**). This use of *mystery* appears also in the companion letter to the Ephesians (**3:4-6**). The mystery religions, which played on the Gnostic theme (γνῶσις; **1:9-10**, 27), catered to intellectual/informational exclusivism; but Christ is for all people (Ephesians **3:14-16**; cp. Isaiah **55**; **60:1-3**; the Book of Jonah; and Acts **15:16-18** < Amos **9:11-12**).

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