

The Disappearing Church

September 11, 2016

Titus 1.5-14

- Paul explains Titus' mission:
 - 1.5 to set in order (arrange properly) the things that are lacking; and to ordain elders
 - 1.10 because there are many who are “out of order”
 - 1.11 and are therefore dangerous
 - 1.12-13 there is a distinctive “cultural” element to this

Titus 1.12-13

- Reveal the existence of cultural influences that are detrimental to the Church
 - Perpetually dishonest
 - Like wild animals
 - Idle gluttons
- Recognize the legitimacy of cultural influences: “This witness is true.”
- Reveal the proper response: “Rebuke them sharply.”

The Historian Niall Ferguson identifies 6 major reasons why the West is more prosperous than the East

- Competition. Competition fosters economic growth and lowers consumer prices
- Scientific Revolution
- Property Rights
- Modern Medicine
- Consumerism; free markets
- Work Ethic

All of these have had major impacts on America, and so have had impact on American Christianity

- The work ethic has had a major influence on American Churches—people of that mindset want to come to Church and work
- Consumerism has had a major influence on American Churches—people want a menu of things offered by the Church

American Churches have also been influenced by the ancient philosophy of Gnosticism.

- The word comes from the Greek word for knowledge
- It's translated "science" in 1 Timothy 6:20, "O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called: "

Gnosticism

- Is a religious philosophy that arose very early in the Church era; perhaps shortly prior to the earthly ministry of Jesus
- It believed in a deity who was pure spirit; who was above and beyond human experience
- This deity created nothing, but all substance (visible and invisible) emanated from it
- These substances took the form of lesser deities (some good, some bad), who exist and operate in between humans and the “ultimate” deity

- Human nature reflects the dual nature of the world: the evil and the good
- Humans have then, a “divine spark,” but most of them are unaware of this
- One of the most important of those intermediate beings is Wisdom (Sophia)
- Salvation is the deliverance from ignorance, which is dispelled by Gnosis, which is obtained primarily by Jesus
- The books of Colossians and I John are particularly devoted to combatting Gnostic heresy

And it hasn't gone away—there is a modern version

Ancient

- The world is inferior
- Matter is the problem
- Escape your body for perfection
- Look inward to find god
- Escape the world; find the perfect spiritual place
- Seek inward truth
- You have god within

Modern

- Your world is inferior
- The mundane is the problem
- Turn your body into perfection
- Look inward: find the real you
- Escape the mundane; live an amazing life
- Seek fulfillment
- It's all about you

The Bible argues

- God's creation is good, but broken by the fall
- Sin and rebellion are the problem
- Jesus is the means to perfection
- Look to the bible to find reality
- Escape nothing—meaning is found in worship
- Seek God and Christlikeness
- It's all about God