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BIBLE STUDY Q&A

In Revelation 3:8 it says, "you...have not denied my name." What does it mean to deny His name? Give some examples.

Read Revelation 3:8-9. Notice in the context there are those who say they are Jews and are not. This could apply both physically and spiritually, but the primary application is those who claim they are Jews spiritually, i.e., Christians (Romans 2:28-29). John was writing what Christ was speaking to the Church. Early in the history of the Church, when the Church was mostly Jewish, there were Gnostic heretics who claimed falsely to be Jews. They blended the use of the name of Christ and certain doctrines concerning Christ with Jewish traditional law, theosophic Jewish fables, and features of pagan religion and philosophy. But at the time of the writing of Revelation the heresies in the Church were anti-Jewish. Jews were hated and persecuted. There were few who would be claiming to be Jews who were not. But there were many claiming falsely to be Christian. It's a popular notion these days that if you claim the name of Christ, if you claim faith in Christ, that makes you a Christian. The truth is, however, as we'll see, being a Christian in God's eyes requires far more than a superficial faith or using Christ's name.

Paul wrote to Timothy, "...continue in the things which you have *learned* and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to *make you wise for salvation* through faith which is in Christ Jesus. *All Scripture* is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:14-17).

As the above Scripture implies, our knowledge in spiritual matters must be guided by, and derived from, the word of God--the Bible (see also Isaiah 8:20; 66:2; Luke 4:4). Very early in the history of the Church there arose teachers and their followers claiming the name Christian, and claiming superior knowledge. But their doctrines were derived from sources other than Scripture. The heresies they taught are today known as *Gnostic* heresies--or Gnosticism (after the Greek word for knowledge, *gnosis*). The treatise of Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, is a primary source of information about Gnosticism, and one of the earliest. Irenaeus traces the origin of Gnosticism to Simon Magus (I,XXIII,2; II,preface,1), a Samaritan teacher. (Most Gnostic teachers were of Samaritan or Egyptian origin). Gnosticism is not a single doctrine because each Gnostic teacher developed his own doctrines (Irenaeus, I,XXI,1; I,XXVIII,1), so only the broadest generalizations may be made. In general, Gnosticism was a syncretistic blend of oriental mystery religion, Greek philosophy and elements of Christianity, and, sometimes, Judaism (or its Samaritan counterpart, but many Gnostic teachers were rabidly anti-Jewish).

The earliest Gnostics claimed to be Jews (often falsely) and placed emphasis on not only the burdensome Jewish traditional law, but also on theosophic Jewish fables relating to the origins and nature of the spiritual realms and the universe, eschatology, and the practice of magic (see *The Life and Epistles of Paul*, pp. 353-360, 691, for a discussion of the Jewish elements in Gnosticism). Cerinthus was a Judaizing Gnostic active for a long period beginning not long after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He was "educated in the wisdom of the Egyptians," according to Irenaeus (I,XXVI,1). The "wisdom of Egypt" included both its mystery religions and Greek philosophy. The Egyptian culture and its mystery religions were a very powerful influence on Greek philosophy, especially Platonism, and the two were closely intertwined. Egyptian and other oriental mystery religions were

extremely popular in the Hellenistic (and Roman) world.

Cerinthus is also linked to the "Ebionites" by Irenaeus (I,XXVI,2), and others. "Ebionites" was an epithet applied to a remnant of the Jerusalem church that held fast to the commandments of God, and--a segment of them--to some of the traditional Jewish observances. Ebionite Gnostics (not to be confused with the Jerusalem church remnant) were Gnostics, like Cerinthus, who, in addition to teaching other confusing doctrines, laid great stress on circumcision and traditional Jewish law. It's possible that, as some scholars have believed, the heresy in Galatia, prompting Paul's epistle, was incited by Cerinthus and his followers. Later, after the Church became predominantly Gentile, Gnosticism was for the most part virulently anti-Jewish.

Gleaned from Irenaeus are some of the characteristics and teachings of Gnostics, as follows: They claimed secret, mystical knowledge of the spirit realms, and this knowledge, along with related magical incantations, is the basis of salvation (I,XII,6; I,XXI,4; I,XXIV,6; I,XXVII,3). The antinomian Gnostics (of which were the majority) taught that Jesus abolished the law and the prophets, and that being free of law, they could do as they please with impunity (I,XXIII,3; I,XXV,4; I,XXVII,2). Those who are spiritual have no need to be concerned how they conduct themselves, because for them works or conduct has nothing to do with salvation (I,VI,2-4; I,XXIII,3). They used the name of Jesus Christ, called themselves Christian, and used terms and expressions from Scripture, distorting their true meaning, often through the device of allegory (I,Preface,2; I,III,1-6; I,VII,1; I,IX,4; I,XIX,1-2). Irenaeus said they could dress up error so that to the unwary it would seem "more true than the truth itself" (I,Preface,2).

Some of them represented the God of the Old Testament as an inferior demiurge, sometimes identical with Satan, or sometimes inferior to Satan. Jesus was sent by the "father who is above the God that made the world," (the latter the God of the Old Testament), to abolish his works and law and save those who believe (in Jesus) from his power (I,V,1-6; I,XXIV,1-4; I,XXVII,2). Jesus despised the God of the Old Testament and, though educated in Jewish practices, despised them (I,XXV,1-2). (It is true that Jesus denounced elements of Jewish traditional law and the hypocrisy of its proponents, but the Gnostics, and later others claiming to be Christian, misrepresented the Christ's sentiments as much more extreme). They taught that Christ, being spirit, the mind (*nous*) of the Father, did not die (I,XXIV,4; I,XXVI,1).

They used images of pagan deities in their worship (I,XXIII,4), and had no scruples about eating idol sacrifices, "maintaining that God does not greatly regard such matters" (I,VI,3; I,XXIV,5; I,XXVIII,2). They readily took part in the celebration of heathen festivals (I,VI,3). Some of the Gnostics were ascetics, forbidding marriage and the eating of animal flesh (I,XXIV,2).

Their doctrines concerning the divine nature are in some ways similar to the Trinity doctrine, which is not surprising, since both owe a great deal to Platonism and Egyptian concepts of deity. Valentinus championed the concept of a tripartite Pleroma. "One God" consisting of an Ogdoad, Decad and a Duodecad (groups of 8, 10 and 12, respectively); altogether 30 "Aeons" (emanations from the divine substance) existing coordinately and coeternally with the Deity (I,I,3). The concepts of Valentinus and his disciples regarding the nature of the Deity are very much like those of Plotinus (*circa* 204-270 A.D., founder of Neo-Platonism) and his successors. God is one, or unity, incomprehensible, beyond all thought, speech or nomenclature (I,II,5; I,XI,3). Only the Aeons emanating from the Deity in Valentinus' system are tetrads (groups of

four), and in Neo-Platonism they are triads (or trinities, groups of three).

So we have people using Christ's name, calling themselves Christian, but teaching doctrines diametrically opposite to those of the Bible. The apostles vigorously opposed Gnostic heresies. Numerous statements in their writings, and several books of the Bible, were written specifically to combat Gnostic heresies. Some Gnostic teachers arose within the Church of the apostles, wreaking havoc. Others maintained separate assemblies apart from the true Church, yet calling themselves Christian. Some of the early "fathers" of the "catholic" Church, Irenaeus and others, continued to fight against Gnosticism, even as its doctrines and practices were almost imperceptibly creeping into that Church. Gnosticism, as mentioned earlier, represents a syncretistic religion blending pagan religion and philosophical concepts with Christianity. Scholars (such as Hilgenfeld and Overbeck) have correctly understood it as the Hellenization of Christianity, accomplishing in the first century "a result which was only obtained by a gradual process in Catholic Christianity" (*The Triumph of Christendom in the Roman Empire*, Appendix 2, p. 359).

Traditional Christianity, unfortunately, has in its doctrines and practices perpetuated many of the errors of Gnosticism, particularly the principles by which it operated: Blending elements of Christian belief with pagan religion and philosophy. Adoption of heathen festivals and customs. Rejection of God's system of law and government, especially the Sabbaths God made holy and tithing. The use of Christ's name to teach a religion that he did not teach. The use of Biblical terms and phrases to teach polluted, false doctrines. The teaching of concepts of deity borrowed from pagan religion and philosophy that are completely foreign to Scriptural teachings.

Heresies condemned in Scripture are perpetuated in today's popular Christianity. It uses the name of Christ, but is it genuine or is it a fraud? What's in a name? Name (*onoma*) in Bible means more than a "handle" by which someone is called. It also can refer to "all that a 'name' implies, of authority, character, rank, majesty, power, excellence, etc., of everything that the 'name' covers," including, "of the 'Name' of God as expressing His attributes..." (Vine's, p. 425). Mr. Armstrong applied Rev. 3:8 to the use of the name of God in what the Church calls itself, the Church of God, pointing out that many other churches use the name of a man, or something else to call themselves by. Some have applied it to denying Christ's name by worshipping a Trinity, which falsely represents God. Both are ways in which we can deny Christ's name (keeping in mind that a name is more than just an empty title).

Revelation 2:13, holding fast to Christ's name goes with not denying the faith (the true beliefs and practices of Christ). Mt. 10:32-33 (confess: *homologeō*; deny: *arneomai*). In a similar statement in Luke an emphatic form (*aparneomai*) is used of being denied in heaven ("shall be utterly denied in the presence of the angels of God in heaven). (Deny, forsake, if we forsake Christ he will forsake us, 2 Chron. 15:2; 24:20, 2 Tim. 2:11-13). Matthew 7:21-23, here are people using Christ's name, they appear to be Christian, but he says he does not and never did know them. Though they are using Christ's name they are denying his name. How can this be?

Verses 15-20. 2 Peter 2:1-2, False doctrine, turning grace into lawlessness: Jude 4. Works, 1 Tim. 5:8; 2 Tim. 3:5; Titus 1:16. We must deny self, Mt. 16:24-25.

In summary, those who deny Christ's name are those who refuse to abide in his teachings -- his commandments, including the ten commandments. However, if we strive diligently to yield to

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God, let Christ live in us, keep his commandments, we will not be denying him nor his name.