



UNIT: COMMON HERESIES

LESSON 2 | SPIRIT OVER BODY

WHAT WE WANT STUDENTS TO LEARN: That both the physical and spiritual world are in need of a Savior.

WHAT WE WANT STUDENTS TO DO WITH WHAT THEY'VE LEARNED: Be able to identify movements that seek to prioritize the spiritual world as better or inherently good and respond appropriately to the teaching of Scripture.

SCRIPTURE FOCUS: Genesis 1:26-31, 3:1-5, 2 John 1:7, 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24, 1 John 4:1-3, John 3:1-6, Revelation 22:1-5.

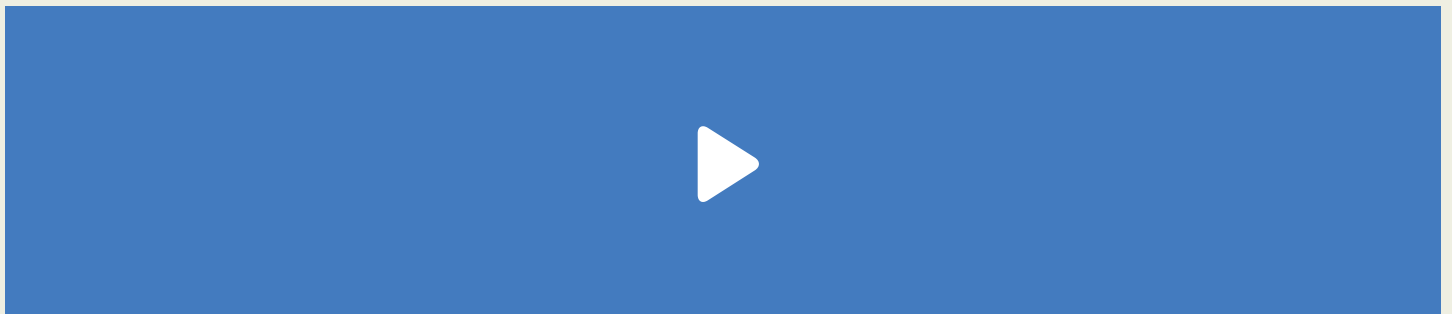
ANCHOR STATEMENT: Both our body and our spirit have been affected by sin. Neither is more pure or holy, and both are in need of the salvation that can only be found in Jesus Christ.

OVERVIEW:

Gnosticism and other belief systems like it are nothing new. It is a heresy that is addressed heavily in the New Testament. The belief that the spiritual realm or reality is inherently good is a false teaching that denies our desperate need for Jesus Christ. By understanding God's promise to redeem both the physical and the spiritual world, we can grow in our appreciation of a Savior who meets both our physical and spiritual salvation needs.

TEACHER PREP VIDEO:

Each *Anchored* lesson comes with a Teacher Prep Video. These short videos are designed to help you grasp the lesson's main point as you prepare to teach.



BIBLE BACKGROUND

The *Bible Background* is a focused, brief overview of some of the background info for the main passage you will be teaching.

- **WHAT DO WE MEAN BY "CONTEXT"?** In every YM360 Bible study lesson, you'll notice we make a point to encourage you to provide the context for the passages you study. By "context" we mean at the very least helping students know *who* wrote the book, *when* it was written, and *why* it was written.
- **WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?** When we teach the Bible without giving context, students don't get a "big picture" understanding of the story of the Bible. But this view is vital to grasping the story of God's plan of redemption for humankind. As you teach, use the *Bible Background* to help summarize the context.

THE DETAILS

Genesis

- *Author:* While there's no specific author named within the text, Moses is the accepted author for Genesis, with some editing and additions done after his death (such as the account of his death!).
- *Time frame:* It's difficult to establish with any certainty a date for the completion of the Pentateuch (a name for the first five books of the Bible—including Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy—of which Genesis is a part). Most of the material originated from Moses himself, and depending on the date of the Exodus (which is also not known for sure), that would make a date for the writing of Genesis sometime in the 1400s or the 1200s BC.
- *Purpose:* Genesis details the earliest history of our world, including creation and Adam and Eve's fall. It also focuses on the emergence of Israel, not only as God's people but as the group God would work through to bring redemption to the world.

1, 2 & 3 John

- *Author:* 1, 2, & 3 John were written by John the Apostle. John was one of Jesus' disciples and was referred to as "the beloved disciple." John was probably only a teenager when he spent his three years with Jesus. In addition to 1-3 John he also authored the Gospel of John, and Revelation.
- *Time frame:* The letters were probably written sometime after the Temple was destroyed in 70 AD, but probably no later than 90 AD.
- *Purpose:* John was writing to a population (1st-century Christ-followers) who had seen their ranks diminished at the onset of Roman persecution. John was calling his audience to a doctrinally sound and application-oriented faith. He reminded his readers of Christ's teachings and urged them to put them into practice.

1 & 2 Thessalonians

- *Author:* Since the early church period, the Apostle Paul has been the acknowledged author of 1 and 2 Thessalonians, though there has been recent (and failed) attempts to challenge this authorship.
- *Time frame:* 2 Thessalonians was probably penned from Corinth in 49–51 A.D., shortly after 1 Thessalonians.
- *Purpose:* The Thessalonians were under the false belief that the "day of the Lord" had arrived. They were greatly confused about the second coming, resurrection, and so on. They were scared and confused. Paul wrote the letter to help calm their fears and straighten them out, doctrinally speaking.

Revelation

- *Author:* The writer of Revelation identifies himself as John four times. Scholars agree that it is most likely John the Apostle, son of Zebedee, one of Jesus' most beloved disciples.
- *Time frame:* Revelation was written toward the end of John's life somewhere between 90 and 95 AD.
- *Purpose:* The purpose of Revelation was to reveal the fullness of Christ's identity and to provide hope for suffering Believers at the time who were encountering grave persecution and suffering. Today, it provides us hope of what is to come, as well as a stark warning of the battle that rages until Christ returns.

THE SETTING

During the time of the early church there was a group of people known as the Gnostics (Naa-sticks) who held that the physical world was evil, and that a person's physical body was an obstacle that prevented them from seeing the spiritual "secrets" of the world. Many of the Apostle Paul's letters addressed this exact issue, warning of the dangers of abandoning the physical for only things that were spiritual.

THE MAIN POINT

We are created by God to be both flesh and spirit; that is how it has always been. When Christ saves us, we are filled with the Holy Spirit that lives within us. The Holy Spirit immediately begins His work by helping us resist sin and live the life that God wants us to live. While our bodies now are fragile and will one day break apart, God has promised to give us new bodies that will never age and never ache, which will match our eternal spirits' that have been made clean by Jesus' sacrifice.

LESSON PLAN

The *Lesson Plan* contains three elements: an introductory activity called *The Lead In*; the Bible Study section called *The Main Event*; and an application-focused segment called *The Last Word*.

THE LEAD IN

- *Goal:* To help students think about their physical bodies.
- *Set-Up:* Make sure you have plenty of room for students to move around and enough balloons for each student to receive one (plus a few extra in case one breaks/pops). Also, have a small prize for a winner.

FIRST, explain to students that you have a challenge for them. If they compete and win, they get a prize. Let them know ahead of time that this will involve physical exercise.

THEN, have the competitors spread out on the floor and hand each of them a balloon. To save time, you can inflate these beforehand, or you can ask students to inflate their balloons. Explain to students that they are to keep their balloons up in the air by any means. The student who keeps their balloon up the longest will win. You can make this even more difficult by allowing other students to throw paper balls at the balloons. If time allows, feel free to run more rounds if you have a large number of volunteers.

THEN, discuss the game with students. Explain to them that even though some of them wanted to keep the balloon up, their body had its limits. That's why we were able to turn this into a competition! Explain that even though our physical bodies are limited, that does not mean they aren't worth taking care of, or that they aren't a gift from the Lord.

FINALLY, say something like:

- **Today, we're going to talk about how the Bible views our body as both physical and spiritual, and what role our bodies play in our walk with Christ.**

If there are no questions, transition into the Main Event.

THE MAIN EVENT

- *Goal:* To help students see that there is no difference in the physical or spiritual world when it comes to the need for a Savior.
- *Set-Up:* Make sure students have a Bible or Bible App.

FIRST, remind students that we in a unit called "Common Heresies." Briefly review that heresies are false beliefs (doctrines) that are designed to draw you away from God and His truth. Explain that today, we are going to be talking about a heresy that focuses on God's creation, specifically on His creation of our physical bodies.

THEN, introduce the idea of something called the 'gnostic' approach. Explain that the Gnostics believed the physical world was all bad and was a barrier preventing us from experiencing the hidden spiritual 'truth' of the world. The Bible does not teach this!

Read or have a student read Genesis 1:26-31. **Say something like:**

- **When God made humanity, He intentionally created us with physical bodies. You might think, 'Well, yeah, of course. How else would we get around?' However, a group of people called the Gnostics believed that the physical body is sort of like a prison for our soul. Gnostics, who practice Gnosticism, get their name from the Greek word 'gnosis' (know-sis), which means 'knowledge.' Which kind of makes their pursuit sound like a good thing at face value. We want to know God, so seeking knowledge of Him is a good thing, right? But the problem is that Gnostics believed the knowledge they were pursuing was secret knowledge, only accessible when we remove ourselves from the physical world and place our attention on 'spiritual' things. They believed that everything in the spiritual world was inherently good and everything in the physical world was inherently bad. Their belief was that we need to be delivered from the physical world in order to**

go to the spiritual world. For them, that was the meaning of salvation. One of their strangest arguments is that Jesus only took human form temporarily because of their view of the physical world.

Explain to students that there are several core beliefs that Gnostics held that are heretical. But we are going to center our lesson around their beliefs about our physical and spiritual world. First, explain to students that Gnostics viewed the physical world as evil (and, by extension, our physical bodies as evil). **Ask:**

- **Can anyone think of some ways that the Gnostics might use Scripture to agree with their view of the physical or material world?**
 - *Answer:* The Bible does tell us to reject materialism or the love of physical things (Matthew 6:19-21), and it also warns against chasing the desires of the flesh/physical body (Galatians 5:16).

Say something like:

- **There are many verses within Scripture that warn against chasing after our fleshly desires and storing up material possessions. And this is often how Gnostics got their listeners to stick around. As we talk about common heresies, it's important to note that a lot of heresy uses bits and pieces of God's Word so that there appears to be an element of truth in the overall message. Let's take a look at how Satan twisted the truth of God to make his own heresy in the Garden of Eden.**

Read or have a student read Genesis 3:1-5. Once it has been read, point out how Satan twisted God's Word so that Eve would be drawn away from God. By mixing in some truth, he was able to mislead and deceive.

NEXT, say something like:

- **By speaking about things that would have sounded similar to the instructions of Scripture, Gnostics were able to mix in their own version of the Gospel, which essentially says that our journey to holiness is within our spiritual self. Once we reject all of the evil physical matter, like food for example, we can ascend into a higher state of 'being' and see things on a spiritual plane. A good example of this heresy in our modern-day is the belief that humanity is preparing to enter a 5D spiritual world and that anyone who isn't at a certain spiritual frequency will be left behind in the 3D physical world.¹ This belief, adapted from the writings (and interviews) of a woman named Dolores Cannon, has captured the attention of people everywhere, even after her death in 2014. Unfortunately, there are Christians who have been deceived into thinking these false prophecies are compatible with their faith because Dolores occasionally used Scripture. What appears to be a 'new idea' is really just recycled bits of Gnostic teachings. If you pay attention, you can still see Gnostic ideas and beliefs creeping into books, movies, lyrics, and so on.**

Read or have a student read 2 John 1:7. **Ask:**

- **Why is it important for us to understand that Jesus came to Earth 'in the flesh.'**
 - *Answers will vary.* Help students see that Jesus came to Earth as fully human (and fully God).

Read or have a student read 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24. **Ask:**

- **What is redeemed and sanctified, or made holy, by Jesus when He returns?**
 - *Answer:* Our body (flesh), soul, and spirit. Everything is made new because everything needs to be redeemed.

Explain to students that Gnostics practiced forms of asceticism, which basically means they took extreme measures to avoid all things that might be perceived as physical. Asceticism is not just 'fasting' or 'abstinence.' It is a lifestyle of avoidance and self-focus that seeks to destroy what God has given us: our bodies. The Gnostics who practiced strict asceticism were hijacking spiritual disciplines to 'level up' spiritually and enhance their knowledge of good and evil, not to increase their dependence on God. **Say something like:**

¹For the leader only: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XP9gxJMqukc>

This is an interview with Dolores that has been clipped and shared many times. This is not beneficial to play for your students, but may be beneficial to watch so that you may understand how the enemy is still capturing the attention of the world and distorting God's Word.

- The verses we just read remind us that every part of us needs redemption from sin, which comes through our faith in Jesus Christ alone. Gnostics believed only their flesh was in need of cleansing, but their spirits were just fine. This is false teaching, and it is just another example of what happens when we believe that humanity doesn't need a Savior; it just needs to 'do better.' This heresy encourages us to pursue secret knowledge that can only be gained by looking inside ourselves, to so-called 'hidden' gospels, or to the spiritual realm. But this is a behavior that Scripture specifically warns us against!

Read or have a student read 1 John 4:1-3. **Ask students:**

- **Why should we test the spirits?**
 - *Answer:* Because not all spirits are good! Ergo, the spiritual realm is not inherently better, it is filled with evil too.

Explain to students that the biggest fault of the Gnostic pursuit of knowledge is that they assume everything found in the spiritual world is 'good' and everything found in the physical world is 'evil.' But in this very passage of 1 John, we see a warning against false (evil) spirits and a reaffirmation that Jesus Himself came in the flesh! Gnosticism wasn't just a problem at one time in the Church. It has been an issue since the formation of the Church. **Say something like:**

- **Ok, so let's boil this down as simply as we can. The physical world is fallen and broken due to sin, which is contrary to how it was created in Genesis. God created the physical world and called it good, but that changed when Adam and Eve sinned. Gnostics were not wrong to be skeptical of their fleshly sinful desires. But God's goal is to eventually redeem the physical world and our physical bodies so that they can be restored to their original 'goodness,' which we saw in Genesis 1. The catch is that only God can restore our physical world- something He is doing through Jesus Christ. Gnostics do not proclaim this part of Scripture because they believe that the physical world must be destroyed, leaving only the 'good' spiritual world. What they don't realize is that the spiritual world is full of evil as well. It isn't just our flesh that needs restoration. It's our spirit, too! And just like the physical world, only God can redeem the spiritual world.**

THEN, take a moment to make sure students understand what has just been said. Give students an opportunity to ask questions or seek clarification from what we've learned so far. This is a tricky topic! Once you feel like they are ready to move on, remind students of their Anchor Statement:

BOTH OUR BODY AND OUR SPIRIT HAVE BEEN AFFECTED BY SIN. NEITHER IS MORE PURE OR HOLY, AND BOTH ARE IN NEED OF THE SALVATION THAT CAN ONLY BE FOUND IN JESUS CHRIST.

NEXT, read or have students read John 3:1-6. **Ask:**

- **How can we understand this passage in light of what we have talked about today?**
 - *Answer:* There will be a rebirth of both flesh and spirit. Both are necessary so that we can dwell with God forever.

FINALLY, explain to students that even though our bodies fail us, especially as we age, this does not mean that the physical world is any more broken than the spiritual one. Remind students that when they hear or see someone proclaiming the value of the spiritual world over the physical one, they should be wary. Encourage them to think back to 1 John 4:1-3 and test these 'new-found spiritual truths' against God's Word. They might find that these seemingly new spiritual revelations are just recycled bits of the Gnostic heresy!

Ask if anyone has any thoughts or questions, then transition to the Last Word portion of your lesson.

THE LAST WORD

- *Goal:* To point students towards to promise that God will redeem both spirit and flesh.
- *Set-Up:* Make sure students have a Bible or Bible App.

FIRST, explain to students that we are going to close out our time by looking at a passage in Revelation. Read or have a student read Revelation 22:1-5.

Say something like:

- **Throughout the Book of Revelation, we see God's promise to dwell with His people in an eternal home that will be free from evil. But I want you to think about what we just read... This new dwelling place that God will share with His people is a physical place! It's not only going to be a spiritual reality, as the Gnostics tried to say; it's going to be a physical reality as well.**

THEN, ask students:

- **What are some of the physical elements that you see listed in this passage?**
 - *Answers:* A flowing river, a throne, a tree that yields fruit, the people will see the face of Jesus, the name of God will be written on their foreheads.

NEXT, say something like:

- **Our hope in the redemption of the spiritual and physical world is a key part of our faith in Jesus. If we try to elevate one over the other, we fall into the same trap as the Gnostics, who believed they were capable of finding truth within themselves.**

FINALLY, if there are no more questions, close the lesson in prayer.

- Don't forget to remind students about their devotions this week. If you're posting them on Social Media or some other means of electronic distribution, make sure you inform students of when they will be receiving them.