

FREE IN CHRIST: MYSTICISM'S MISERY

Colossians 2:18-19

Mysticism's Misery (Colossians 2:18-19)

Definition: “Mysticism may be defined as the pursuit of a deeper or higher **religious experience**. It is the belief that spiritual reality is perceived apart from the human intellect and natural senses. It looks for truth internally, weighing feelings, intuition, and other internal sensations more heavily than objective, observable, external data. Mysticism ultimately **derives its authority from a self-actualized, self-authenticated light rising from within**. This irrational and anti-intellectual approach is the antithesis of Christian theology.”

Bottom line: “Mysticism seeks truth through feelings, intuition, senses dreams, supposed visions, and hallucinations.”

(John MacArthur, emphasis added)

Mysticism's Misery

“The fourteenth century saw the blossoming of mysticism, a movement that has influenced the church to this day. Mysticism asserts the earthly possibility of a personal, immediate union of the soul with the being of God Himself. It offers direct knowledge of God by extraordinary experiences and states of mind. What drove this [mystical] desire for experiencing the extraordinary and for reaching new levels of consciousness? One factor was misinterpretation of the Bible.”

Mysticism's Misery

“For example, 2 Peter 1:4 says that God makes Christians ‘partakers of the divine nature.’ This passage could be overspiritualized if read out of context. In addition, passages such as the transfiguration (Matt. 17:1-13), Paul’s description of a soul’s experience of the third heaven (2 Cor. 12:2), and John’s vision in Revelation – when misinterpreted – led to an unwitting mixture of biblical Christianity with non-Christian and pagan mystical experiences and philosophies.” [And, he adds...]

Mysticism's Misery

“Christian mysticism offered a ‘**retreat**’ from an often overwhelming, hostile, and confusing world. It focused upon subjective inner experiences, allowing the mystic to **disengage or ignore** the outside world.”

(Dr. Peter Lillback, emphasis added)

Mysticism's Misery

In Colossians 2:18-19, Paul is asserting the sufficiency of Christ for godly living.

We will see the **command**, the **consideration**, and the **corrective** for what Paul has in mind concerning **mysticism**.

Please keep in mind that the issue at hand is that Paul is counteracting what is **not according to Christ**; meaning that these are manmade burdens of worldly tradition, empty philosophy, and childish, carnal ideas.

I. The Command:

“Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize...” (Col. 2:18)

You have freedom from sin’s bondage in Christ alone.

So the message is: Don’t let anyone who denies or tries to add to the sufficiency of Jesus, or who tries to add to the Bible’s teaching, don’t let them steal away your spiritual freedom which Jesus has won for you on the cross... *by delighting in...*

II. The Consideration:

“...by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind.” (Col. 2:18)

II. The Consideration

“...taking his stand on visions he has seen...” (personal experience)

Trump card:

- “God told me...”
- “God spoke to me...”
- “God said to me...”
- “God spoke to my heart...”
- “I have had spiritual experiences far beyond your spiritual pay-grade...”

II. The Consideration

“...taking his stand on visions he has seen...” (personal experience)

Paul **boldly counters** with *“inflated without cause by his fleshly mind.”*

‘You are confident and proud without good cause. You think you are spiritual-minded when you are actually conceited, self-absorbed, and carnal-minded.’

“Theology is never an explanation of someone’s experience. It is a revelation from God.” (John MacArthur)

III. The Corrective:

“...and not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God.” (Col. 2:19)

III. The Corrective

There are no secret spiritual pathways or spiritual shortcuts to Christian freedom and forgiveness.

Mysticism is misery because **it draws you away from Christ and into yourself.**

III. The Corrective

“The history of mysticism only too clearly shows that he who begins by seeking God within himself may end by confusing himself with God.”

(B.B. Warfield)

III. The Corrective

“...no healthy Christian ever moves past sermons, Scripture, prayer [ordinances], and the organized church. These are the God appointed means by which we grow in Christ. When we reject these ordinary means laid out in the Word, we not only invite...spiritual elitism [into our lives], we also show ourselves to be more ‘spiritual’ than the Spirit Himself.”

(Kevin DeYoung)

III. The Corrective

“The Scriptures teach us to test the spirits because false teaching emerges from the fallen hearts of mankind, including our own. Salvation is not man-centered, whether in terms of feelings, choices, ideas, or visions. All truth and wisdom are gifts of divine grace and are found in Christ. Our pursuit of God must be Christ-centered and based upon the revealed Word of God.”

III. The Corrective

“Thus, biblical Christianity, especially with its restoration in the Reformation, rejects unfettered mystical experiences in favor of the scriptural revelation of Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, the fallen nature of man means that we must reject our inner impulses as our primary spiritual guides and instead practice humble reliance on the Word and Holy Spirit. When we meditate, we should meditate upon Scripture. When we seek extraordinary experiences, we should consider the extraordinary miracles that God has performed in history and recorded in His Word. When we seek to know God, we should know the Scriptures that speak of Him (John 5:46), pray to our loving Father, and participate in the church and [ordinances].”

III. The Corrective

“We should thereby embrace the Great Commandment to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength (Luke 10:27), remembering that neither our minds nor our feelings will lead us to God without the true ‘inner’ experience of the Holy Spirit’s grace in Christ grounded in His inspired Word.”

(Dr. Peter Lillback)

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