

Light Brings Salt

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Iron Range Bible Church

Dedicated to the Systematic Exposition of the Word of God



Confronting the Menace of Mysticism Pastor John Griffith

One of the reasons that Paul wrote to the Colossian believers was that they were being intimidated by people who claimed to have a higher, broader, deeper, and fuller union with God than Christ alone could give. They were the mystics of the day. They claimed to have interacted with angelic beings through visions and other mystical experiences.

Paul said to them:

Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize 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, 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 2:18-19)

Mysticism is very much alive today and still using spiritual intimidation to demean the uninitiated. People today who claim to have had heavenly visions or spellbinding experiences are often simply puffed up with idle notions, using their claims to intimidate others into elevating them. As the Apostle Paul wrote the Colossian believers, that, that kind of mysticism is the product of a prideful and unspiritual mind. Those who embrace it have turned from their sufficiency in Christ, who alone produces true spirituality. Don't be intimidated by them.

Apparently the Colossian mystics claimed that anyone not having similar esoteric visions or embracing similar doctrines was

disqualified from obtaining the prize of true spirituality. and its benefits in their lives.

Mysticism is the idea that direct knowledge of God or ultimate reality is achieved through personal, subjective intuition or experience apart from, or even contrary to, historical fact or objective divine revelation. Arthur Johnson, a professor at West Texas State University has this to say:

When we speak of a mystical experience we refer to an event that is completely within the person. It is totally subjective....Although the mystic may experience it as having been triggered by occurrences or objects outside himself (like a sunset, a piece of music, a religious ceremony) the mystical experience is a totally inner event. It contains no essential aspects that exist externally to him in the physical world....A mystical experience is primarily an emotive event, rather than a cognitive one...Its predominant qualities have more to do with emotional intensity, or "feeling tone," than with facts evaluated and understood rationally. Although this is true, it alone is a woefully inadequate way of describing the mystical experience. The force of the experience is often so overwhelming that the person having it finds his entire life changed by it. Mere emotions cannot effect such transformations.

Furthermore, it is from this emotional quality that another characteristic results, namely, its "self-authenticating" nature. The mystic rarely questions the goodness and value of his experience. Consequently, if he describes it as giving him information, he rarely questions the truth of his newly gained "knowledge." It is this claim that mystical experiences are

“ways of knowing” truth that is vital to understanding many religious movements we see today.

Prevalent especially in the charismatic movement, modern mysticism embraces a concept of faith that in effect rejects reality and rationality altogether. Waging war on reason and truth, it is thus in direct conflict with Christ and Scripture. It has taken hold rapidly because it promises what so many people are seeking: something more, something better, something richer, something easier, something fast and easy to substitute for a life of careful, disciplined obedience to the Word of Christ. And because so many lack the certainty that their sufficiency is in Christ, mysticism has caught many Christians unaware. It has thus swept much of the church into a dangerous nether world of confusion and false teaching.

Mysticism has created a theological climate that is largely intolerant of precise doctrine and sound biblical exegesis. Note, for example, how widely popular it has become to speak scornfully of doctrine, systematic Bible teaching, careful exegesis, or the bold proclamation of the gospel. Absolute truth and rational certainty are currently out of vogue. Authoritative biblical teaching is decried as too dogmatic. It is rare nowadays to hear a preacher challenge popular opinion with clear teaching from God’s Word and underscore the truth with a firm and settled “Thus saith the Lord.”

Ironically, a new breed of self-appointed prophets has arisen. These religious quacks tout their own dreams and visions with a different phrase, “the Lord told me...” That is mysticism, and it preys on people looking for some secret truth that will add to the simplicity of God’s all-sufficient, once-for-all delivered Word.

A well-known charismatic pastor has reportedly told his flock that sometimes in the morning when he’s shaving, Jesus comes into his bathroom and puts His arm around him and they have a conversation. Does he really believe that? I don’t know. What I think is involved is that he wants others to think that

he is more intimate with Christ than most of us. Whatever the case, his experience contrasts sharply with biblical accounts of heavenly visions. Isaiah was terrified when he saw the Lord and immediately confessed his sin (Isa. 6:5). Manoah having met the angel of the Lord feared for his life and said to his

wife, “We shall surely die, for we have seen God” (Judges 13:22). Job repented in dust and ashes (Job 42:5-6). After Jesus stilled the winds and the waves the disciples were petrified (Luke 8:25). Peter said to Jesus, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!” (Luke 5:8). Each of them was overwhelmed with a sense of sinfulness and feared judgment. How could someone casually talk and shave while in the presence of such an infinitely holy God?

A newspaper recently told of a well-known television evangelist who was taking a nap in his home when suddenly, he claimed, Satan himself appeared, grabbed him around the neck with both hands, and tried to strangle him to death. When he cried out, his wife came running into the room and chased the devil away. That same man has reported other bizarre experiences over the years.

I don’t believe accounts like that at all. Aside from the fact that they often don’t align with biblical truth, they distract people from the truth of Christ. People begin to pursue paranormal experiences, supernatural phenomena, and special revelations as if our resources in Christ weren’t enough. They spin their views of God and spiritual truth out of their own self-authenticated, self-generated feelings, which become more important to them than the Bible. They create experiences in their minds from which they develop a belief system that simply is not true, opening themselves to further deception and even demonic influences. That’s the legacy of mysticism.

Mysticism also destroys discernment. Why should people think for themselves or compare what they are taught with Scripture, when their teachers claim to receive truth directly from heaven? Thus mysticism becomes a tool through which unscrupulous

leaders can coerce money and honor from the flock with fabricated experiences that play on people's gullibility.

Remember in the late 80's Oral Roberts' infamous claim that God would kill him if listeners didn't send several million dollars to his organization? Over the years he has made similar fantastic pleas, ranging from the promises of a miracle for certain sums of money, to the claim that God would reveal to him the cure for cancer if everyone would only send several hundred dollars. That kind of extortion is made possible because too many Christians don't recognize the error of mysticism. People want to support what God is doing but they don't know how to discern things biblically. Consequently they're indiscriminate in their giving. Some send enormous sums of money in hopes of buying a miracle. By doing so they think they're demonstrating great faith, but in reality they're showing great distrust in the sufficiency of Christ. What they think of as faith in Christ is really doubt looking for proof. Such weak people are easy prey of mysticism's false promises.

Preachers who confront mystical teachings are often branded as judgmental, unloving, or divisive. Mysticism has thus cultivated a tolerance for false and careless teaching. But the biblical mandate is clear: we must "holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict." (Titus 1:9,).

There is no higher plane, no surpassing experience or deeper life. Christ is all and all! Cling to Him. Cultivate your love for Him. In Him alone you are complete!

News Note

The date for the upcoming "Annapolis" round of Middle East peace talks has been set for November 27, but the talks should be called off before they even occur because they will likely be a one sided gang up on Israel, who is being demanded by the United States and all the Islamic nations to give up land for peace. The Annapolis "Lynching of Israel", as it has been called by columnist Jan Markell, is bringing together in one place some of the world's foremost sponsors of terrorism and Islamic aggression against the free world with the false hope that brokering a deal of land for peace in Israel will somehow stop the

Islamofascist jihad juggernaut that is inflicting the world with terror.

Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Egypt, Former British Prime Minister Tony Blair, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice will be in attendance—all proponents of Israel giving land for peace will be attending the Annapolis "Lynching of Israel". Let's break this down a little. Saudi Arabia wants Israel to give up Jerusalem for there to be peace. Jordan wants Jerusalem to be the new capital of the Palestinian state. Egypt has been smuggling weapons to terrorists to the tune of \$20 million per month to the most recent "land for peace" Palestinian state model, Gaza. Blair and Rice have been pressuring Israel to give up its traditional lands of Judea and Samaria—the West Bank.

The main man that the U.S. is relying on to deliver the Palestinian side of peace is Abbas. Abbas' chief peace negotiator, Saeb Erekat stated Wednesday that "the Palestinians would never formally recognize Israel as the Jewish state...Israel can define itself however it sees fit... if it wishes to call itself a Jewish state, so be it... but the Palestinians will never acknowledge Israel's Jewish identity." Similarly, PLO Executive Committee member Yasser Abed Rabbo was quoted saying, "It is only a Zionist party that deals with Israel as a Jewish state, and we did not request to be a member of the international Zionism movement." There can be no peace without the recognition of Israel and its right to exist.

Add to this mix is that Iran will also be at the Annapolis "Lynching of Israel" through its proxy Syria. Syrian President Bashar Assad reiterated on Thursday that any Middle East peace initiative that did not include talks on the Golan Heights "would not be serious" and could not achieve a just peace in the region. In 20th Century America, the Ku Klux Klan and other secret societies were known for lynching African Americans and Jewish Americans. Today these are considered a hate crime. What might God say about the lynching of the entire Jewish nation? Zechariah 12:9 says, "And it shall come to pass in that day, that I will seek to destroy the nations that come against Jerusalem." Could it be any plainer than that?