

## CHRISTIANITY EXALTED

*Over Spiritualism*

Colossians 2:18-23

### I. EXALTED OVER MYSTICAL TEACHING: (vs. 18-19)

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 (vs. 18)...

Mysticism can be defined as *the pursuit of a deeper or more advanced personal religious experience*. It's a belief based on *feelings, intuition*, and other *internal senses*. Ultimately, **mysticism** gets its authority from *self-actualized, self-authenticated feelings or revelations*. In other words...*my experience* and *feelings* rank over *Biblical truth* or the *authority of Scripture*...over *what the Bible says!*

Those *false teachers* who try and turn believers from *Christ's sufficiency alone* for their *salvation* and *Lordship*...turn to a *performance based religion* or a religion based on *visions* and *dreams*...are seeking to **defraud** them...*rob* them of their **prize**...of their *spiritual rewards*.

**Defrauding**...Gk. *katabrabeueto*, means *to rob, to decide against, to turn against*. Like a judge who disqualifies those who run out of their lane in a race, so are believers who move away from the boundaries of truth, and from faithfully following Christ. They will be *disqualified* or **defrauded** of their *rewards (prize)* from Him.

*“According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it. For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.”*

~I Corinthians 3:10-15

**Inflated without cause by his fleshly mind**...Many *false teachers* who *influence believers* to *turn away* from *faithfully following* Christ, have a *false humility manifesting a fleshly or worldly mind*...which is only an *appearance* or a *form of godliness* (**II Timothy 3:1-5; Romans 8:1-5**). They are *puffed up* with *pride*. Like the **Pharisees** in Jesus' day.

**Delighting in self-abasement**...means *false humility*. It's like someone telling you how *humble* they are. Their supposed *humility* is nothing more than *ugly pride...narcissism...self-absorption*. It reveals an *artificial godliness*.

**The worship of the angels**...of which Scripture *rebukes*.

*“I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed me these things. But he said to me, ‘Do not do that. I am a fellow servant of yours and of your brethren the prophets and of those who heed the words of this book. Worship God’.”*

~Revelation 22:8-9

*“For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.”*

~I Timothy 2:5

In fact, **Paul** says that *mystical teachings* are inspired by *fallen angels*, who are *deceitful spirits*...*spirits* that bring men into *bondage* by their *mystical meditations*. These *legalistic mystics* dwell on what they have *seen*...*visions they have seen*...*Dreams* and *visions*.

*“But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth. For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude; for it is sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer.”*

~I Timothy 4:1-5

**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 (vs. 19)**...

While a *false teacher* believes that his *mystical teachings* bring him in *closer touch* with some *higher reality*...it actually has the opposite result. It causes him to *lose connection* with the **Head (Christ)**...the One who alone supplies life which **grows...a growth which is from God. Life reproduces life!**

*“I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.”*

~John 15:1-5

*True spiritual growth* doesn't come by *compliance with legalistic expectations* of man...or by some *mystical vision* or *dream*. It comes by *being connected with the Life*.

*“I am the way, and the truth, and the life...”*

~John 14:6

Without being *connected to the Head*, the *body of Christ cannot grow*...it will not *mature*.

*“I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.”*

~John 15:5

There is a tendency in human nature to move from *objectivity* to *subjectivity*...to shift the focus *from Christ to experience*. This brand of modern-day **mysticism** is most commonly seen in the *charismatic movement*...where Scripture is a distant second in importance to *visions* and *revelations* and *experientialism*.

## II. EXALTED OVER ASCETICISM: (vs. 20-23) *Self-denial... Abstinence.*

If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, “Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!” (vs. 20-21)...

When **legalism** and **mysticism** connect...when the two are *combined* ...the *result* is **asceticism**. It's the *pseudo-spiritual position* that revels in rules of *physical* and *spiritual self-denial*. The church has been intimidated for centuries by those who advocate *poverty* and *self-denial* as a means to *spirituality*. (ie. the **Roman Catholic Church**...*priests* and *nuns* and their *vow of poverty* and to *never marry*).

**Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch**...These *prohibitions* and *limitations* always *increase* in progression over time. Here we see it move from *not handling* to *not touching*. This same *legalism* was manifested in Eve's carnal exaggeration when confronted by the serpent in the **Garden of Eden**. She responded to the serpent when challenged...

*“...From the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, ‘You shall not eat from it or touch it, or you will die’.”*

~Genesis 3:3

What God actually said was...

*“The Lord God commanded the man, saying, ‘From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die’.”*

~Genesis 2:16-17

**Asceticism** arises from *guilt*...when people are *guilted*. But Christ has *taken away* all *human guilt* by His death (**Colossians 2:13-14**).

*“Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”*

~Romans 8:1

So...If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world...you are *no longer obligated* to *obey* or *comply* to *man's legalistic performance based expectations*...*man's law*...*legalism*. Only those *alive to sin* feel the need, or feel compelled, to continue to obey it as their master.

*“What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it? Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death?”*

*Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin.”*

~Romans 6:1-7

*Worldliness* is living by the *world's rules...man's rules* and *standards...by political correctness*. This even includes those that have a *show of humility* and declare that they have received some *alleged enlightenment...those who say that they have received an angelic source of inspiration*. Ie. *Visions* and a *word* from God.

*Spiritual maturity...is living by grace through faith with the power of the Holy Spirit, in union with Christ.*

(which all refer to things destined to perish with use)—in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men? (vs. 22)...

*Asceticism* is a *man-made system of rules...often with a hint of truth, but is then taken out of context from God's Law*. It's based on **the commandments and teachings of men**. The persistent example in the New Testament was the Old Testament command of *circumcision* which God intended for the **Jews** as *a sign of covenant relationship...a seal of the righteousness of their faith*.

The *legalists* wanted to make *circumcision* a *condition of grace* (**Galatians 2:11-21**).

These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of **wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement** and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against **fleshly indulgence** (vs. 23)...

Living by *legalistic regulations* or *man-made religious expectations* can give a certain **appearance of wisdom** and *spiritual maturity...but it has absolutely no value* in *restraining sensual* and **fleshly indulgence**.

**Legalism** is the *religion of human achievement*. It argues that *spirituality* is based on Christ *plus human works*. It makes *conformity to man-made rules* the *measure of spirituality*.

**Are of no value...legalism** is useless...because *it can't restrain the flesh...against fleshly indulgence*. It's also *dangerously deceptive* because someone can *conform* to a set of *rules, rituals*, and *performance based standards* and not even be a *true believer*. *Legalism* may be able to *control one's actions* but it *can't change one's heart*.

Denying the body of its *God given desires* actually *arouses* them. Those *desires* need to be *fulfilled* in a Godly manner. *Neglecting the body...doesn't nourish the spirit or soul*.

#### LESSONS WE CAN LEARN:

- Jesus Christ is absolutely **SUFFICIENT**. It isn't Christ plus anything for the believer. It's Christ and Christ alone! For salvation...for Lordship...for atonement...for forgiveness...for grace...for mercy...
- True spiritual maturity doesn't come by any **MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE**...it comes through knowing Christ through His Word.
- Legalism is the religion of **MAN-MADE RULES**...compliance with **MAN'S EXPECTATIONS**. Through one's union with Christ, the believer is set free from man-made rules designed to promote spirituality. In Christ, we have liberty.