

THE PRISON EPISTLES: NURTURE FOR OPPRESSED BELIEVERS

II. Colossians: Nurture In Living Focused On The Supremacy And All-Sufficiency Of Christ

H. Nurture In Focusing On Christ's Supremacy And All-Sufficiency Contrary To Mysticism (Colossians 2:18-19)

I. Introduction

- A. One of the ideologies that has plagued conservative Christianity for centuries is mysticism, subjective religious experience often associated with alleged visions and encounters with spirit beings. People who claim to have grown close to God and ascertained higher knowledge by such experiences have often led those who seek a "deeper life" with the Lord down a spiritually troublesome path, the path of mysticism.
- B. The Colossian heresy involved a degree of mysticism, so Paul exposed and countered it in Colossians 2:18-19, a passage that serves us remarkably well in view of the "Christian" mysticism we face today (as follows):

II. Nurture In Focusing On Christ's Supremacy And All-Sufficiency Contrary To Mysticism, Col. 2:18-19.

- A. Since another characteristic of the heresy Paul's Colossian believing readers faced was what we today call mysticism, he claimed that one's adhering to it will disqualify him from a truly spiritually rewarding walk: Paul commanded his readers to let no one "disqualify" (*katababeuo*, Arndt & Gingrich, *A Grk.-Eng. Lex. of the N. T.*, 1967, p. 410) them (NIV, ESV) of true spirituality in their Christian walk by mysticism, Col. 2:18a.
- B. Then, he described mysticism in ways that are revealing even for us today, Colossians 2:18b,c,d:
 1. Mysticism is practiced by those who "take pleasure" (*thelo*, Ibid., p. 355-356; *U. B. S. Grk. N. T.*, 1966, p. 698) in [false] "humility" (*tapeinophrosune*, Ibid., Arndt & Gingrich, p. 812), Colossians 2:18b.
 2. Mystics seek to promote the worship of spirit beings like angels, and go into detail about what they have seen in visions (*horao* = "see; see a vision," Ibid., 581-582; Ibid., *U. B. S. Grk. N. T.*), Colossians 2:18c.
 3. This mystical tendency is fueled by inflated pride (*phusioo*, Ibid., Arndt & Gingrich, p. 877) that springs from the mind that is controlled by the "flesh," that is, by one's sin nature, Colossians 2:18d.
- C. Accordingly, for our benefit today, mystics can be described as follows:
 1. Mystics function by means of the sin nature, expressing pride as their predominant sin, Gal. 5:19-21a.
 2. As such, mystics can tend to hold themselves aloof "above" the rest of the Body as "special" believers versus interacting with others to share the ministries of their gifts and to be ministered unto by others.
 3. Mystics try to impress other people that they are exceptionally spiritual due to their [false] "humility."
 4. Mystics may extol spirit beings or go into detail about visions they have seen, trying to impress others with their "spirituality." (cf. Paul's disdain for having to tell of a *true*, great vision he had, 2 Corinthians 12:1-6)
- D. However, mysticism dramatically fails the test of *true*, Biblical **spirituality** as revealed in Colossians 2:19:
 1. Truly spiritual Christians realize that in their "flesh," in their sinful nature, dwells no good thing (Romans 7:18), so instead of trying to concoct a "spirituality" that takes pleasure in one's own perceived humility or promoting the worship of angels or seeing or describing visions they have had in false pride, they hold fast (*krateo*, Ibid., p. 449-450) to the Head of the Church, the Lord Jesus Christ, Col. 2:19a. In other words, truly spiritual Christians are Christ-centered, and exalt Him alone in life and ministry! (John 16:13-14)
 2. Truly spiritual Christians realize that out of Christ, the Head of the Body of the Church, all of the individual believers in the Church are supported and held together by Christ, Colossians 2:19b NIV, ESV. That being so, they don't exalt themselves above or separate from fellow Christians as if to function independent of them, but seek to be co-operative in ministering as part of the whole Church body!
 3. Truly spiritual Christians realize that the Church then grows by the growth that comes from God in Christ (Colossians 2:19c) as opposed to mystical self-help efforts of trying falsely to be humble or extolling angels or seeing visions and relating their details to others in false pride! Accordingly, in true humility, they are content to use the spiritual gift God has given them in the midst of others in the local Church (Romans 12:3-8), trusting God to cause the increase in numbers or maturity, Acts 2:47b; Eph. 4:11-16.

Lesson: Paul countered the mystical elements in the Colossian heresy, exposing it as disqualifying one from true, rewarding spiritual vitality, with its preoccupation in false humility, extolling angels and detailing visions in false pride by the sinful nature versus correctly holding to Christ, the Head, Controller and Grower of the Church Body.

Application: May we look to Christ as our Supreme and All-Sufficient Head for spirituality, ministry and growth of the Church versus dabbling in mystical experientialism that is promoted in the sinful nature with false pride.