

Free in Christ: Mysticism's Misery

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[0 : 0 0] well I'll reserve getting back into second Peter when we come back God willing God willing we're not taken to glory while we're on a mission trip what a way to go we know that the Lord has called us to great commission work every day of our lives we know we don't have to travel out of the country to do mission work do we every time we walk out of these doors or out of the door of our homes we're doing mission work aren't we for the Lord that is our privilege to do that we're going to be in the book of Colossians today and I'm going to already confess as I've told one of our visitors this is a total setup I am setting you up for a few Sundays from now when I'll come back and God willing we'll be back in second Peter I want to set you up for what Peter's going to talk about I'll even read through the passage today that we'll be dealing with when we come back again all Lord willing the title of my message for today is free in Christ mysticism's misery Paul is going to be dealing with legalism mysticism and asceticism in the passage that we'll be reading or at least focusing on today from Colossians chapter 2 what I'd like to do is begin by reading the entire chapter with you so that you get the flow and feeling and again we love reading the scripture here together at grace so

Colossians chapter 2 Paul begins for I want you to know how great a struggle I have on your behalf and for those who are at Laodicea and for all those who have not personally seen my face now think about it beloved that's a strange way for him to launch into this segment of scripture is he comes before them I want you to know how great a struggle I've had on your behalf that doesn't sound very humble or self-effacing does it well let's read on that their hearts may be encouraged these people who've never seen his face that their hearts may be encouraged having been knit together in love and attaining to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding resulting in a true knowledge of God's mystery that is Christ himself in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge I say this so that no one will delude you with persuasive argument now that's the issue that he's zeroing in on in chapter 2 particularly now I don't want anybody to delude you with these persuasive arguments they sound good but for even though I am absent in body nevertheless I am with you in spirit rejoicing to see your good discipline and the stability of your faith in Christ therefore is you have received Christ Jesus the Lord so walk in him having been firmly rooted and now being built up in him and established in your faith just as you were instructed and overflowing then with gratitude see to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception according to the tradition of men according to the elementary principles of the world rather than according to Christ for in him all the fullness of deity dwells in bodily form and in him you have been made complete and he is the head over all rule and authority and in him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands that is in the removal of the body of the flesh by circumcision circumcision of Christ having been buried with him in baptism in which you were also raised up with him through faith in the working of God who raised him from the dead when you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh he made you alive together with him having forgiven us all our transgressions having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us which was hostile to us he has taken it out of the way having nailed it to the cross when he had disarmed the rulers and authorities he made a public display of them having triumphed over them through him and now the section that we're going to be focusing on therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day things which are a mere shadow of what is to come but the substance belongs to Christ 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's seen inflated without cause by his fleshly mind 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 if you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world why 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 which all refer to things destined to perish with use in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men why 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 they are of no value against fleshly indulgence they're no value against fighting against sin they won't help you in your struggle against your flesh your tendencies to be selfish and prideful greedy turn to Christ this is the message that he's giving us now I want to ask you this as we consider what we just read why is it why do you think it is that Christians seem vulnerable to the false promise that there is more that is needed for the Christian life than Jesus we are clearly told that all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are found in Jesus Christ all not some not a little bit the Lord didn't leave out all the wisdom and knowledge that you need to navigate the Christian life in a God pleasing way when he gave you Jesus he didn't leave anything out you don't have to turn to the wisdom of man and the wisdom of world to shore up the wisdom that God has given you in your

Savior Savior Jesus Christ who lives in you you have been made complete in him beloved this is the message that we're looking at today we are clearly told that Jesus is fully God and that being in a relationship to Christ means we are spiritually full or complete so that we lack nothing for life and godliness for those of you who've been here does that echo Peter for you the sufficiency of Peter for you the sufficiency of Christ the sufficiency of scripture the question that I'm putting to you however is that why is it that so many of our brothers and sisters actually live a daily life looking for something to add to what God's given them in the fullness of Jesus in our studies from second Peter we've gained an increasing I pray to God an increasing confidence in the sufficiency of the Bible not only is the Bible inerrant not only is the Bible authoritative our single authority for life and godliness but the Bible is sufficient we don't have to add to it and God didn't leave anything out in terms of what we need to live a life that is holy and God pleasing before him everything that we need to live a life that is holy and God pleasing before him everything that we need is here for living that kind of life are you confident in that I want you to grow in that confidence before the Lord and of course Greg and I are very interested in helping you translate that confidence into daily life what does it look like for you to parent under the sufficiency of Christ in scripture what does it look like for you to be married under the sufficiency of Christ in scripture to do your jobs to go about your daily living in whatever you know about your daily living in whatever you find yourself involved in God's word is his provision to help you and I face the issues of life and act faithfully in pleasing him but the world and the flesh and the devil constantly tempt you and I away from this confidence in and this dependence on God's resources for growing in Christ likeness so make no mistake beloved the world wants to throw all kinds of issues at you in terms of its resources that it says can help give you a meaningful purposeful full life what we're told in scripture as Christians as those beloved of the Lord is that God has provided us all the resources for our spiritual life and growth that we need in our savior and in scripture amen this is what we need in our savior and in scripture as to be a spiritual life and in our spirit for our spiritual life and faithfully in our spiritual life and in our spirit as if there's something that can be added to who Jesus is and to what he has done for us.

As if God somehow left us hanging when he gave us the savior of the world, his only precious begotten son. Something that will take us into a deeper dimension of spiritual joy and meaning.

[10 : 45] It seems like there's always books coming out or guys running the circuit trying to tell Christians the secret to the Christian life. Beloved, there's no secret.

It's out. His name is Jesus Christ. That's it. He's the treasure. He's the wisdom. He's the good. Draw near to Jesus and he will draw near to you.

Draw near to the Lord Jesus Christ and he will give you all the fullness of who he is as God. You can't get any more of God than God.

Christ living in us. Now the world, the flesh and the devil hold out all of these trinkets and they're very shiny and they're very tempting. And they come peddled by people, men and women, who are very, very good at salesmanship.

Salesmanship. We need to be very discerning, very careful, very wise. Very gracious as well. So is there something that the world can help us with that will offer us some type of way to a deeper dimension of spiritual joy and meaning?

[11 : 59] No. We know God and we know him through his word because his word tells us of his son. And we know God through Christ.

Jesus, our one mediator between God and man. The truth of God makes us wise for salvation. But is that enough? That's the question.

We know God through Jesus Christ. Jesus who forgives us. Jesus who frees us from the power of sin and death. Jesus who fills us with his life. But is that enough?

It doesn't seem to be. He doesn't seem to be. Is there more? The world, the flesh and the devil will go on telling us there is much more to be had.

Much more to be had. Well, that's a lie. And we want to expose that. And we want to praise and honor the God of glory this morning together as we look into his word.

[13 : 06] He's the author of the truth of scripture. So we'll just let him teach us this morning. Let's start with this. Let's start with mysticism's misery. This is the overarching idea that I want to present to you.

We'll zero in on verses 18 and 19. Let's read those again together from chapter 2 in the book of Colossians. 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's 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. That's what you and I are interested in.

We're interested in the kind of growth that comes from God. Not from man. Not from all of the philosophies and weirdness out there that comes at us constantly every day of our lives.

[14 : 08] We want this growth that is the growth from God. Let's define this term. I don't want to assume that all of us understand what are we talking about when we speak of mysticism.

And the misery that mysticism brings into the Christian life. Now folks let me caveat too. This has been going on for hundreds and hundreds of years. Mysticism isn't anything new.

We constantly find ways in our world to spin things. But there's nothing new under the sun.

Mysticism's been around a long long time. Alright. Let's define mysticism.

Here we go. 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.

So you just put your mind in neutral. Because we're going to have a religious experience. That's what they say. It looks for truth internally.

[15 : 10] 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.

If you say, Jeff, what in the world is that? I have no idea. Neither do they. This irrational and anti-intellectual approach is the antithesis of Christian theology.

Christian theology being how we understand and know God. Let me go back and emphasize the highlights that we have here in this whatever color, yellow, whatever.

Look at it with me. What they're seeking is a religious experience. Folks, we do not seek an experience. We seek a savior. They look for truth internally.

We understand that no truth resides in us. The truth comes from outside. It's given to us by the Holy Spirit living in us as we look to God's word.

[16 : 16] They say that all of this derives its authority from a self-actualized, self-authenticated light rising from within.

We understand that we need to be saved from what is within. Don't we? We need to be transformed. We need a new nature in Christ. We live out of the nature of Jesus that is given to us. There's no light within you. What is within us? What's the scripture say? Dark. There is darkness in us. So we need the light to flood our souls and make us new creatures in Christ.

It's radical, isn't it? It's a transformation that's born of the Holy Spirit. That's what we need. We cannot look from within ourselves. So we're never going to ask you to sit down and light some candles and cross your legs and try to meditate on what a great person you are and try to get in touch with your inner whatever and get it out of there so that you can be enlightened.

We're going to tell you don't do that. That's exactly what you don't want to do. We don't want you looking in. Don't look in. Let me say it again. Please do not look in.

[17 : 28] That's a dark and deadly place. Well, where do we want to look? Well, where does the scripture tell us to look? To Christ. Right. Look. All right.

We'll just do this. Colossians 3. Therefore, since you've been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.

Oh, where do we set our mind? Where do we look? Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. That would include you. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

So our life being hidden with Christ in God, we need to look to Christ. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory. Isn't that wonderful?

And it is so clear. It's so clear. This is the message that we want to put out there. Look to Jesus Christ. He is our light. He is our life.

[18 : 29] We will not find salvation. We will not find truth. We will not find hope and joy and peace in ourselves. Or we wouldn't have needed the cross, would we?

We cannot save ourselves. We cannot give ourselves a better life. You can't buy it. You can't make it. That is something that God gives to you. And it starts on the inside and works its way out.

Here's the bottom line. Let me give you a bottom line because I just said a lot of stuff. The bottom line here coming up at the bottom of the screen. Mysticism seeks truth through feelings, intuition, senses, dreams, supposed visions, and hallucinations.

You might say, well, I don't hallucinate. But maybe one or two of those. What does this all mean?

Well, I want to help you with that. I want to help you understand more specifically what Paul has in mind here.

And I'm going to lean on maybe more than I usually do quotes from different people that I've pulled together that I believe help explain this in a very, very poignant way.

[19 : 36] Let me give you this one. This is Dr. Peter Lilback. He is the professor of historical theology at Westminster Seminary. And he offers some helpful, I think, historical context for what we're talking about in the way of mysticism.

Folks, this is everywhere. This is all over our look. Please don't be offended as I say this. I hope you won't. Please understand where I'm coming from as I say this.

Here's one example that came a few years ago or whatever long it was. It seems only yesterday to me. The Prayer of Jabez. That is a book that is all about this mysticism that we're talking about right now.

Now, if you've read it and you like it, just please tune in and stay with me. You can come up to me afterward and you can ask me anything you want. Just be kind. Be kind.

And we'll discuss it and I'll tell you about the reservation. That is one example among many, many examples of how this kind of stuff gets in. Look, we can't learn to pray prayers to obligate God to do things that we think God ought to do for us.

[20 : 46] God's already given us a way to pray, to seek his wisdom, to know his heart, to operate within that wisdom, to find Jesus as our treasure and live out of that treasure.

It's in the scriptures. And so that's why we pray God's word back to him. I don't need a little book to tell me how to put God into a prayer corner and make him give me what I want.

So I'll be blessed in my life. I don't need that. Neither do you. This whole idea that we can hear from God in these weird ways apart from scripture or even added to.

This is what we want to get away. So now I'm going back to Dr. Lilback. I'll give him a chance to say something here. Here's what he says. Historical context. The 14th 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.

[21 : 48] You say, well, isn't that what we get in Jesus? Yes, in Jesus we get some of that. But this is apart from. It offers direct knowledge. You see that?

Not through Christ. It offers you 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?

And what drove all that? Well, one factor was misinterpretation of the Bible. Why are people in droves all the way going back to centuries? Why are they flooding and flocking to these ideas that you can sit down and have these immediate personal experiences and altered state of mind to get

in connection with God, to get direction from God?

Why? They're misinterpreting the scripture. For example, he says, 2 Peter 1, 4. Wasn't too long ago we dealt with that. Says that God makes Christians partakers of the divine nature.

Sure. This passage could be over-spiritualized if read out of its context. That's right. In addition, passages such as the transfiguration in Matthew 17.

[23 : 02] Paul's description of a soul's experience of the third heaven. We'll read about that in a little while. John's vision in Revelation. All of these, when misinterpreted, led to an unwitting mixture of biblical Christianity with non-Christian and pagan mystical experiences and philosophies.

Now, he goes on, one more, and he adds this. Christian mysticism offered a retreat from an often overwhelming, hostile, and confusing world.

So, it focused upon subjective inner experiences, allowing the mystic to disengage or ignore the outside world.

What you can read there is escapism. We are so vulnerable. God help us. We are so vulnerable to these promises of retreat, escape from, get away from.

Diminish the trials and sufferings and temptations of life. Hold that out as a carrot, and many people will line up.

[24 : 11] Give me some of that. So, this is escapism. We're talking now about false refuges for the soul. This is something that biblical counseling, this is something that we're hoping to do when we travel these next couple weeks.

Biblical counseling helps people come to terms and understand better the idea of false refuges that we look for in our heart. That our heart wants to find solace and comfort and assurance in different things as we're faced with the trials of life.

Our hearts want to run to these things. Instead of running to whom? To God and Christ. A lot of the times, we're well-meaning and unwitting. We don't realize, maybe, that our hearts are drifting towards something that will help ease the pain.

Help take away some of the uncertainties. Help us find some type of direction or footing. Anything that would give us a little bit of relief. And we become vulnerable.

And that's when the tempter comes. This is why it's so important for us to understand things that our brothers and sisters in Christ have battled with for centuries upon centuries. This is nothing new.

[25 : 24] And we want to be very careful and very discerning about it. We are not looking to be escapees. We're not looking to escape the issues of the world that come at us.

God says that I'm leaving you in the world to face them. And people will see the way that you live. And that light will become a testimony of me living in you. Giving you grace and power.

The only explanation for you moving through these trials of life with joy and peace in your heart is Jesus lives in your heart. And that's what we want the world to see.

We don't want to rob them of that by looking to their trinkets and all the ways they devise to try to get away from these kinds of realities. Notice in verses 16 and 17 what he says.

Therefore, no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. So these are all religious type of behavior aspects going on in their lives.

[26 : 24] These are things, verse 17, which are a mere shadow of what is to come. But the substance belongs to Jesus, to Christ. He constantly keeps bringing them back to Jesus Christ.

Paul exposes the spiritual elitism of the false teachers who are behind all of this teaching. These men have set themselves up as spiritual judges.

And they're insisting that true piety and relationship with God can only be achieved through, listen, their brand of religious rule keeping.

You've got to do it our way. You've got to say it our way. You've got to genuflect our way. You've got to go through all the rituals and have it all down. So you need us.

You need us to tell you how to do all of this. Then another thing that they do, they come in and they start to create this special language that only they understand.

[27 : 26] They start inventing terminology that they have to explain to you and make you dependent upon them to keep up. So you're constantly having to come back to them to get the right interpretation.

That's why they're not going to want to point you to the word and help you see it for yourself like we're doing today. They don't want you to be independent like that. They want you to be dependent

on them. So then you sit down with them and you find yourself with them constantly having to explain their nomenclature to you.

What does that word mean? What does that phrase mean? What's that concept all about? In biblical counseling, when we do this with you, we take you to the word of God. And yes, we offer you clarity.

We offer you explanation. We try to help you with insight. We might have to explain or take apart certain. But where are we pointing you? We're not pointing you to something we invented. We're pointing you to God's word and trying to help you gain clarity in the truth.

And we're pointing you to the author behind that truth. We're not asking you to become loyal to us. You see the difference? Now, in 2 Peter, God willing, when we get there, give me two more sermons to get there.

[28 : 36] We're going to start talking about false teachers. And he's going to talk about it for a long time. We'll be talking about false teachers for a while. It's all through chapter 2. This is the setup for that.

I want you to understand the kinds of things that they use to worm their way in. Look, they're not going to show up at the door with horns and a pitchfork and a red suit.

And say to everybody, I'm the devil and I'm here to mess this thing up. They're not going to do that. They're going to look just like us. They're going to sound just like us. They're going to be charismatic.

They're going to be easy to talk to. They're going to blend right in. And then the zingers, the heresy. And they twist.

They'll sit in your living room and charm you to death. And the next thing you know, you're drifting. What they're not going to do is point you to the truth of the Lord and help you to understand it in a clear way.

[29 : 32] Using good hermeneutical principles. They're going to twist it all up. What they want to do is get you in line with their brand of rule keeping. It's all about rule keeping.

In effect, these false teachers insisted that everyone else's religious devotion has to look just like their own.

Paul shattered that. He absolutely shattered that judgmental, prideful, and heretical elitism in one way. He held up Jesus Christ as the full substance for what Christians need to live in holiness before God.

That's what he said. If you look again at verse 17. All of these things these guys are profiting here. That's all just a mere shadow of what is to come.

But the substance belongs to Jesus. That's what we need. He's who we need. And then in verses 18 and 19. Paul is simply asserting the sufficiency of Christ for godly living.

[30 : 38] The sufficiency of Christ for godly living. That's the point. Jesus is sufficient to help us live before the Lord in a godly way. Now, here's what we'll see.

We're going to look at very quickly the command, the consideration, and the corrective for what Paul is dealing with here in terms of mysticism. Now, please keep in mind that the issue that we're dealing with, the issue that is at hand is Paul is counteracting what is not according to Jesus Christ. Meaning, these are man-made burdens. This is worldly traditions. This is worldly traditions. This is empty philosophies. This is childishness. These are carnal ideas.

This is the stuff that God wants to deliver us from, not see us weighed back into. So, let's deal with this first thing real quickly. The command. What's the command that we're looking at?

Well, it's very clear in scripture. Let me show you. See if you can see this with me. Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize. That's a command. Don't let this happen. This is stated in a negative way.

[31 : 47] Don't let anybody defraud you of your prize. That's verse 18, the beginning of verse 18. What's he talking about? Well, if you think about this word defraud with me, I want to explain the context of how Paul's using it here.

It means this. Let no one cheat you. Let no one rob you. Or even more literally, and I think this comes out in the ESV in a minute.

Let no one act as umpire against you. Now, that's an interesting concept. Don't let anybody else act as your spiritual umpire against you.

That is, the umpire's ruling would deny you the prize. It would deny you winning. So, you're sliding in, and you're safe, but he's going to say, you're out.

Don't let anybody do that to you. It builds on the idea of verse 16. If you look at that with me again. [32 : 51] Let no one act as your judge concerning. But here now, in verse 18, that same idea is nuanced with the idea of going beyond, beyond allowing yourself to be judged, so that now, actually, you are allowing someone to take you out of the game.

So now, it's not about you being called out when you're safe. This is about you being ejected from the game. That's the idea in verse 18.

Don't let these guys eject you from your spiritual life with Jesus. They can't rob you of Jesus. But what they can do is confuse you and rob you of the joy and the peace and the faithfulness of serving Christ and Christ alone.

Because they're teaching you to give your loyalty to other things. The things that they give their loyalty to. Don't let them do that. All right?

Stop putting yourself under the disqualifying judgments. That's what it means to be defrauded. Stop putting yourself under the disqualifying judgments of those who add to Scripture.

[33 : 59] And effectively, then, rob you of your prize. What's your prize, then? Jeff, what is it that we're getting kicked out of the game? What is it that we're losing here?

Your spiritual freedom in Christ. You don't lose Jesus. You lose your spiritual freedom in Jesus to serve the Lord with joy through wisdom and obedience to His Word.

You lose that because now you're trading the wisdom of God for the wisdom of men. You're trading your loyalty to Jesus so that you can be loyal to these men who are giving you these rules and regulations to follow.

And you might think in your heart, Jeff, you know that, I don't think I would ever do that. Be careful. As soon as you say that, be careful. Again, I'm telling you, these are slick, slick people.

These are slick, false doctrines. They creep in unawares, both the people and the false doctrine.

Right, brother? And we need to be careful and be on guard together.

[35 : 05] Together against this. And it starts in your walk with the Lord. This is how this starts to get in and take root. Your greatest prize, then, in your earthly life is your spiritual life in Jesus, beloved.

Boy, and that's, they hate that. They don't want to see you free in the Lord. They're jealous of it. Christ is your highest and greatest authority.

For you have been made spiritually complete or full in Him. What does the Bible say? And He is the head over all rule and authority.

Verse 10, chapter 2. He's the head over all rule and authority. You can't get any higher in authority than Jesus. So another way to say this is this.

Your day in court, because they want to act like the umpires or the judges over your life. Your day in court has already come and gone. When?

[36 : 07] As you stood before His honor, God the Father. In heaven's highest court. When God declared you righteous, holy, and beyond reproach.

Spotless in your relationship to His law. And He made you right with Himself for all eternity. You say, when? How? What is all that about?

Listen, it's what I prayed earlier. God placed your sins. God placed your debts of disobedience to His law on Jesus Christ. And then Jesus died a criminal's death in your place.

He stood as your substitute to go to the cross. That should have been you. That should have been me. But it was Jesus. He died a criminal's death in our place.

He died in payment of your wrong and my wrong on the cross. So that in His death, your sin debt. Listen to my language here very carefully if you would please.

[37 : 11] Your sin debt would die along with Jesus. He said, I owed a debt of sin debt. Yes, you did. Your sin put you in debt to God as a criminal.

And Jesus, having been buried as your substitute, was also raised to life as your substitute. So that in Jesus, in Christ, what had put you at enmity, at war with God, and made you guilty in His sight, is now buried, dead, gone, and now it's all forgiven in Jesus Christ.

That is the work of His person and His ministry. And it's only something that Jesus Himself could do. Amen? Amen? Amen. No other person, no other person could have gone to the cross to pay for your sins and my sins except Jesus because He was the sinless, spotless, perfect substitute that God provided for you.

Friends, it's personal. The cross is personal to you and to me. Don't miss the reality of the cross. If you look at the sin debt issue, it's right here.

Look at verse 14 in chapter 2. Having canceled out the certificate of debt that you owed. What debt? Consisting of decrees against you, which was hostile to you.

[38 : 37] Well, what happened to that certificate of debt, of all the debt of sin that I owed to God? Well, He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.

Amen? That's what happened to your sin. That's what happened to my sin. Jesus Christ died for you and was raised for you that through the power of the Holy Spirit who raised Him from the dead, you also, through that same power and that same Holy Spirit, might have life, life in His name because, listen to this, where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.

And that's what they hate. They don't want you to be liberated. They want you to be in bondage to them. Don't let them put you in bondage.

That's what Paul says. Don't let them defraud you. Don't let them delude you and imprison you again. Don't let them do that. Don't let them steal away your spiritual freedom, which Jesus has done for us.

Look at this. You have freedom from sin's bondage in Christ alone. So the message is this.

[39 : 54] 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.

Knowing that these men delight in, delight in, look at this. This is the next step, the consideration here. They delight in self-abasement.

Notice your text. In self-abasement and the worship of the angels, they take their stand on visions they've seen. That's where they plant their feet.

That's their foundation on the visions that they've seen. Inflated without cause by their fleshly minds. Oh my goodness. Just when you thought it couldn't get any worse, it gets worse.

The text here is it speaks by delighting in self-abasement. What are they talking about? In a word, self-effort. Self-effort.

[40 : 55] What we're dealing with here is don't be taken in and intimidated by their vain enthusiasm. What are you talking about?

Their vain enthusiasm. Sorry, I'm having trouble with this thing. Vain enthusiasm. It's what appears, what they're putting forward that appears as spiritual sincerity.

I told you they're charmers, man. They know how to talk about this stuff. They know how to seduce people spiritually. It's actually false humility.

They're gonna come off very humble. It's actually false humility. A mock, phony, or counterfeit humility which only appears spiritual. Notice the text again.

By delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels taking their stand on visions they've seen but notice inflated without cause by their fleshly... This is all about being carnal.

[41 : 54] They're fleshly-minded men with this spiritual veneer over them. They delight in their pride. You say, Jeff, what are they delighting in?

They're delighting in their pride. They're delighting in their religiosity. They're delighting in their knowledge and their ability to woo people.

Then they try to pass it off to you as being something delightful so that you'll want to have it too. Self-abasement can actually be translated as humility.

Here it's put in a negative context. Humility is a gift of the Holy Spirit. But here it's used derogatorily because they use it to contrast true humility with the shallow and pretentious piety of tricksters.

Tricksters who from vanity showcase themselves as being spiritually deep and especially religious. They have special insight.

[42 : 57] I mean, they'll talk your socks off. You'll sit there and listen to them and they'll just... You ever seen that movie The Jungle Book with the snake when he does his weird eyes and Mowgli just...

That's what they do. They're very, very good at it, folks. Now, look, I don't want to scare you like you think, oh my goodness, you know, I'm going to have to be really careful whose eyes I look into now. And, you know, not that. What do you need to do? Hold fast the head. Hold fast the head. Draw near to Jesus. Make your life about following the Lord Jesus.

If you trust your shepherds and listen to your shepherds, follow your shepherds until we give you a reason not to. The only reason I can think of that you wouldn't follow Greg and I in our leadership is because we're no longer following Jesus.

We're going to trip. We're going to stumble. We're going to fall. Just pick us up and dust us off a little bit and say, oh, that one hurt, didn't it? Yeah. And then help us. Let's go. Let's keep going.

[43 : 55] We'll constantly point you to the word, point you to Jesus. That's not what these guys do. These spiritual elitists say, look at this. This is what they do. Oh, look at our humility through self-denial.

That's abasement. Look at how much we're denying ourselves. Look how pious we are. Paul counters with this. Look, look at your hooley.

That's somewhere in the Greek, I'm sure, that I'm getting that out of there somewhere. Look at your hooley through self-effort. That's how Paul counters. Look at your self-effort.

This becomes even clearer through their worship of angels. Do you see that in the text? Worship of angels. Angels. Now, what in the world? Where'd they get that from? Well, this is just idol worship. The idea is we are so humble. Listen to this now. And they pass this off. These people were listening to this. This is why Paul is writing and saying, stop doing this, y'all. Y'all, whatever, Southern.

[44 : 59] Listen, we are so humble that we don't dare try to worship God or worship Him directly.

Even we are not worthy of that. Even through Jesus, because of our humility, we take a lower route by worshiping the angels. And they were passing this off and it was working.

Now, that may sound spiritual, but it's not scriptural, is it? God says, you shall have no other gods besides me.

We should never seek to worship what God has made. And He made the angels. So that would have been the first ticket right there to help us, the flag, red flag.

No, we're not going to worship what God has created. We're going to worship God. God calls that idol worship. Deuteronomy 5, 7 through 10.

[45 : 57] The Ten Commandments. The first few verses deal with the issue of idol worship. You shall have no other gods before me. Now, just in case you might want to argue or challenge any of this with any of these guys, the false teachers have a trump card.

And they're very, very eager to play it. And here it is. This is how they're going to shut you up and counter any arguments that come their way from you.

This is what it is. From the scripture, it says, taking, taking his stand on visions he has seen. Personal experience.

That trumps everything. I've had an experience. Don't you tell me this isn't real. I'll tell you what happened to me. And that's supposed to trump everything, including God's word.

And this is what they want to do. I wish I could tell you how many times this has happened to me. How many times I've encountered Christians who have talked to me about these kinds of experiences in their life and we try to get into a discussion about it and they come to the place where they say to me, but this happened to me.

[47 : 08] This just happened to me a few weeks ago in a counseling session. Somebody outside of our church. Unfortunately, they didn't come back. And it was all about how do we hear from God? And I said, brother, we hear from God through through scripture.

That's how we hear from God. But what about it? And he gave me this very elaborate explanation of how God had directed him to a certain area, place in his life when he was seeking direction.

And he quoted from three different places in scripture, both Old Testament and New Testament.

And it all had to do with mountains. And wherever he saw mountains in the Bible, he realized mountains symbolized obstacles.

And so God was clearly telling him that he was going to overcome all of the mountains or obstacles that would be presented in his life so that he could be in this certain location to do this certain thing. And my response was, brother, none of the passages that you quoted to me about mountains have anything at all to do with where you're supposed to move or where you're supposed to live or being obstacles.

[48 : 15] Not a single one. That isn't what the scripture means by any of those contexts. Not a one. But, but, but, but. And back and forth we went with me pointing to the scripture.

Here's where it finally ended. But I'm here. In other words, I've had an experience. I'm proof.

The fact that I'm here and everything was overcome. Here's what they want to do. They want to make you tell them, well then, if it was, if that wasn't from the Lord because it doesn't match up with scripture, then what was it?

And now the monkey's on your back. Here's what I say. I have no idea what that was. I can just tell you what it wasn't. It wasn't God leading you through the context of scripture. I can tell you that. Because you're misinterpreting the Bible.

Now God's gracious and I'm glad that God worked through all these but, you see what I mean? I hope that's clear. The end is not put your foot down and say, I had an experience.

[49 : 21] This happened to me. If it doesn't line up with the truth of God, it doesn't matter what happened to you. And I don't have to explain to you what that was. I can just take you to the word and say, here's what God's word says.

This is what we stand on and live on. This is how we gain direction in our life. Here's how we hear from the Lord. If it falls within the purview of what the truth tells us, then we're in good shape and we'll move forward.

I hope that makes sense to you. We got to try to be as gracious as we can, folks, but it isn't loving to let people believe lies. I don't want you to be led by impressions.

I don't want you to be led by intuitions and feelings and sensations and what you think might be the voice of God. I'll just say to you, are you wanting to hear from God?

Yes. All right. He's speaking loud and clear right here. You want to hear from God? Open this book and read its pages. And if you don't understand how he's giving you direction, let's sit down and talk about that together.

[50 : 25] All right. That's what we do. And the reason that we do that is because we want people to embrace the head, Jesus, and the truth that he's written in scripture and find their fulfillment and their substance in the greatest substance, Jesus.

Not impressions and ideas. Taking his stand, back to the text, taking his stand, here's where the ESV is spot, spot on, is translated as going on in detail or it could be going on in lavish detail.

I think that's how the ESV says it, going on in detail. Here's the idea. The idea is, oh, yes, you can call it self-effort, you can call it idol worship, you can do all of that, but I have had a personal experience and that's it.

I remember one time I was trying to talk with someone as graciously as I knew how about an issue that was a charismatic issue. It was according to the doctrine of the charismatic church.

And as I was getting into this conversation with this person and trying to go back and forth about how the Holy Spirit worked, I remember they came to the point where they said, well, the Lord told me.

[51 : 49] And that was the end. God told me.

God spoke to me. God said to me. You've seen all these. God spoke to my heart.

I've had a spiritual experience far beyond your spiritual pay grade. That's kind of what they're saying. Well, Paul boldly counters. Don't take my word for it. Look, folks, Paul boldly counters with this.

They are inflated without cause by their fleshly minds. Try saying that to somebody when you get into these discussions. They don't like that. I'm like, look, I didn't write it.

Paul wrote it. That's how he counters this. You are confident and proud without good cause, brother, sister. You think you are spiritually minded when you are actually conceited, self-absorbed, and carnal minded.

[53 : 04] Folks, I actually had this conversation with another person I was actually interviewing to go as a possible candidate to their church. It was way up north in the northern part of the United States.

And the guy said to me on the phone at one point, we've been talking for probably 45 minutes or so, and I was answering all of his questions still very early on in the process, and he came to the point where he said, well, I want you to know something.

He was a deacon in the church. My wife has her private prayer language. Now, no judgment, folks, just listen. And many times in her private prayer language where she speaks in tongues in private, he said it's only happened a couple times in the church, but it's mostly her private prayer language. She gets direction from the Lord through this private prayer language, this tongue speaking. And he said, sometimes what she gets in those private times, she gets direction even for our church.

How would you feel about that? What do you say? I'm not going to tell you what I said. This is what Paul boldly counters with.

[54 : 16] If you contrast Paul's example, if you contrast Peter's example, if you see in these men something entirely different, and it's very interesting to me how much of a contrast we see in the lives of these men.

in 2 Corinthians 12, Paul says this as he starts to close out his letter, boasting is necessary, though it is not profitable, but I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord.

Here's what he's doing. Paul is writing this letter to defend his apostleship because he doesn't want these people to stop listening to him. He's bringing them the truth of Jesus, and his heart is broken. And the Corinthians ran him out of town. And so he's writing to say, I love you guys. I've only ever given you the truth. Now he's at a point where, all right, I'm being forced to almost lay out my apostolic credentials before you so that you will ground yourselves again in the fact that I'm telling you the truth.

I'm giving you what Jesus gave me to tell you. So he says this, boasting is necessary, though it's really not profitable, but I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord.

[55 : 28] He's talking about visions and revelations he's had as an apostle. I know a man in Christ. He's talking about himself. I know a man in Christ who 14 years ago, whether in the body, I do not know whether out of the body.

I do not know. God knows such a man was caught up to the third heaven. And I know how such a man, whether in the body or apart from the body, I do not know.

God knows was caught up into paradise and heard inexpressible words which a man is not permitted to speak on behalf of such a man.

I will boast. But on my own behalf, I will not boast except in regard to my weaknesses. For if I do wish to boast, I will not be foolish. For I will be speaking the truth, but I refrain from this so that no one will credit me with more than he sees in me or hears from me.

What's Paul saying? He's saying, look, I don't go around talking about all of this and using this as my platform because I don't want you to think more of me than you should think. I don't want you to put your faith in me, but I'm telling you that I'm that man.

[56 : 38] This happened to me. Even Paul is saying, I can't explain it. What was it in the body? I don't know. This is Paul.

It happened to him. I don't know. Well, these are the these are the men who worship angels and boast about things they don't know anything about. Very different from Paul.

Peter's the same way. Let me just quickly read you the passage from second Peter that I hope to be in next time I'm in the pulpit with you. And this would finish up second Peter chapter one.

This is the passage. Listen to Peter's testimony. For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power. Verse 16, 116. We did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus.

But we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. See for when we received honor and glory from God the father, such an utterance as this was made to him, to Jesus by the majestic glory.

[57 : 41] This is my beloved son with whom I am well pleased. And we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Jesus on the holy mountain, the transfiguration. So we have the prophetic word made more sure to which you do well to pay attention is to a lamp shining in a dark place until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.

But know this first of all, no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will. But men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

What's Peter saying? He's saying, look, I was on the mountain of transfiguration. I saw this happen. I was exposed to the glory. I heard the voice from heaven, the majestic glory. I heard God say this to Jesus.

I was there. But I have something more sure that you can bank on. God's word. God's word, the prophetic word made more certain.

You weren't there, but I can give you something that's greater than even that experience that I had. It's the Bible. It's the word of God. That's next time.

[58 : 53] God will and pray for me. That'll be a good one. I'll really keep you here on that one. All right. Let's look at this and then I'll start to close out here. Theology is never an explanation of

someone's experience.

It's a revelation from God. That's right. Anything that we understand about God, we understand because God's revealed it to us in scripture through Christ. That's the truth.

So where Paul takes us next tells the entire story of where he wants us to be in relationship with spiritual elitism and mysticism. Here it is. This is the final thing, the corrective.

And not holding fast to the head, these men from whom the entire body being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments grows with a growth which is from God. Paul then, as I've said and said, Paul wants us holding fast to Jesus and not chasing after these personal experiences, these visions, these impressions, these words, these ideas.

Dreams, whatever. The issue concerns your relationship to Jesus. Are you loving Jesus Christ through faith and obedience to his more sure word of truth?

[60 : 07] faith. And I'll say this again. There are no, no secrets. There are no secret spiritual pathways or secret spiritual shortcuts to Christian freedom and forgiveness.

Mysticism is misery because it draws you away from Christ and into yourself. Here's something that theologian B.B. Warfield said, and I couldn't pass this up.

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

Oh, you don't want that. And then I promised some visitors that are visiting with us that he likes Kevin DeYoung and so do I. I want to give you a Kevin DeYoung quote here.

How about this one? No healthy Christian ever moves past sermons, scripture, prayer, ordinances and the organized church.

[61 : 04] 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.

Jesus prayed for us saying, sanctify them, make them holy, set them apart. How? In the truth.

And then what did he say? Thy word is truth. John 17, 17. So through the truth of scripture, God sets us apart to himself and makes us holy so that we're spiritually free to love and to obey him with joy.

Friends, self effort, seeking after personal experiences, they only work against us worshiping the Lord. Let me get to I'm going to go past. You can I'll put this up here and you can read the rest of it later.

Let me go past these two. Let me end with this right here. This is the third paragraph on that quote I was just putting up there. We should thereby embrace the great commandment to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, 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.

[62 : 23] Grounded isn't in his inspired word. That's how we know that's how we're grounded and put in a good foundation. And you say to me, well, Jeff, is that going to help us face the trials and the sufferings and the temptations of life?

Yes. Friend, better than anything else that man could ever offer you. God may not bring you out of the trial or the suffering in the moment or in the timing that you want.

But here's what you can know. This is one of the sessions I'm teaching when we go to Europe. You can know that God is good and does good to you. That it's personal, that whatever you're experiencing in your life, God is doing a work that is good to conform you to Jesus.

And he's going to keep you in that experience to reveal these false refuges that your heart wants to run to, to show you idols in your life that you wouldn't have seen if you hadn't gone through this.

But you've got to look. You've got to bow yourself before the Lord and humble yourself before him and allow him to use the truth to reveal these things to you. And then you confess and repent and forsake these things and learn to replace them with godliness.

[63 : 33] It's the Christian life, not mysticism. Let's pray together. Father, thank you for the kind attention of your people. Thank you for their attentiveness as they've listened and taken in.

To the degree that we've been able to be biblically accurate and truthful, to the degree that we've been able to be clear, God, may you use the word of the Lord to bless us and to bless our hearts, to help us to be fulfilled in the truth, to be careful that we're not led astray from the truth by these clever sounding arguments about who we should listen to and what we should seek.

Help us to seek Jesus and him crucified and raised again. Help us to not be embarrassed or feel foolish when the sophisticated arguments of the world come against us and we simply look at them and say, what do you know of Jesus and him crucified and raised again?

Have you given your heart to Christ? Are you loving Jesus with all of your heart, mind, soul and strength and loving your neighbor as yourself? The world hates this stuff, but this is what they need to hear.

So help us to bring the message and hope and love of Christ to a world that's desperate for the gospel. Help us to be faithful, Lord. Help us to stay true to your word.

[64 : 56] In Jesus name we pray. Amen.