Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Sufficiency of Christ
Scripture: Selected Scriptures
Code: 80-36

I realize that last Sunday I preached my fifty-fourth message in 1 Timothy. Somebody told me there aren't that many chapters in 1 Timothy. And somebody else said there aren't that many verses in 1 Timothy, but I think there are, I haven't counted them up. But I do believe you have been faithful to 1 Timothy so long that you deserve a break. And so this morning my heart is drawn to a very important subject that I want to share with you. The subject is "The sufficiency of Christ...The sufficiency of Christ."

You'll remember a couple of years ago I preached a message on the sufficiency of Scripture. About a year ago, another message on the sufficiency of spiritual resources. And this is the third in a sort of random triology on the sufficiency of Christ. The composite of all of these messages has, of course, to do with the fact that we possess all sufficiency for all things in Him. It's just very important from time to time, no matter what we're studying, that we focus again on all that is bound up in Christ.

In order to do that, I want you to turn in your Bible to Colossians chapter 2...Colossians chapter 2, that wonderful epistle of Paul. And I want to call your attention to verse 10, if I might, the first part of the verse, just one statement. And we'll use that as the initial point to discuss this particular portion of Scripture.

Paul writing in Colossians 2:10 says, "And you are complete in Him." That means exactly what it says...the sufficiency of Christ. You are, from a spiritual viewpoint, complete in Him. The surpassing theme of the New Testament is distilled and articulated in that phrase. Everything from Matthew to Revelation speaks to the issue of the sufficiency of Jesus Christ.

In 1 Corinthians chapter 1 and verse 30, the Apostle Paul also writing, says that in Christ we have all wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption. In 2 Corinthians 12:9 it says, "My grace," that is the grace of God in Christ, "is sufficient for you." In Ephesians 1:3 it says that we have in Christ been blessed with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus. And Hebrews 10:14 says, "By one offering He has perfected forever them that are His, or sanctified forever them that are His."

So, all of these Scriptures speak to the matter of the total sufficiency of Jesus Christ for every need, spiritually speaking, in time and eternity. And no clearer a statement exists than that of Colossians 2:10, you are complete in Him. Having the Lord Jesus Christ is to have everything needed in spiritual

life for time and eternity. To have Him is to have everything. Not to have Him is to have absolutely nothing at all. All joy, peace, meaning, value, purpose, hope, fulfillment in life now and forever is bound up in Christ. And when a person receives Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, they enter in to an all-sufficient relationship with an all-sufficient Christ.

You say, "Is anybody debating that? They certainly are. We live in a time, in a day when there is great doubt cast upon the sufficiency of Jesus Christ. When Jesus Christ appears to be something you add to what you already have, or something you get in order to add to.

I remember some years ago when I was asked to come down to a Hollywood hotel to speak to a group of actors and actresses, someone had arranged a meeting and asked me to come and give them the gospel. I went into a room in the hotel where they were all seated. It was kind of a different environment for me. There were some who were drinking cocktails and so forth, and some who were smoking and there I was with my Bible prepared to preach. And I was convinced this was indeed the right audience for me to speak to because they didn't know the Lord. And I launched into the gospel and I presented the gospel for about 45 minutes and called for faith in Christ.

A young man came to me afterwards, immediately walking up to the front, shook my hand. He was a very handsome man from India. He was a young actor who had come over here to Hollywood to make it. And he said to me, "Your speech was fascinating and compelling." And he said, "I want Jesus Christ in my life." I was thrilled. I said, "Well, let's go over in this little side room," and we did. And he said, "I want to tell you, I'm a Muslim, I've been a Muslim all my life. But...he said...I want to have Christ."

Well I was thrilled. In my ministry I had never had the privilege of leading a Muslim to Christ, nor did I understand that a Muslim might respond to one hearing of the gospel in that way. So I was overwhelmed. And I went through a little more of the detail of opening one's heart to Christ and then I said, "Let's pray." And we got down on our knees and two little chairs and we prayed and he invited the Lord Jesus Christ to come into his life and I prayed and when our prayers were done and he stood up, I was so thrilled and he shook my hand and he said, "Now isn't that wonderful? I have two gods, Jesus and Mohammed."

And I said, "Ah, that's not how it works. You don't add Jesus to what you already have. And you don't having Jesus add anything to Him."

Do you remember that Jesus said, "A man found a treasure hidden in a field and sold everything he had to buy the treasure?" And a man found a pearl of great price and sold everything he had to buy that one pearl? And don't we realize that because of the sufficiency of Christ we give up all things that we may have one and that is Christ? It's an exchange of all that I am and all that I have for all that He is.

But that is not a popular thing. In the day in which we live now, I don't see in our country aggressive hate against Christ, I don't see the great majority of people denying the existence of Christ or even the quote/unquote "goodness of Christ" as a historical person. And there are a lot of people who want to use the name of Christ and might even say they believe in Jesus Christ, but it's inevitably Christ plus something. It might be Christ plus human intellect, or philosophy, or sociology, or mystical experience, or Christ plus ritual or ceremony, self-denial. Christ plus a lot of things, but not Christ plus nothing, not Christ all-sufficient, not total completeness in Christ, not absolute abandonment of my life to Christ. That's what we want to talk about.

Paul writes to the Colossians because they were being intimidated. They were being intimidated by people who were telling them that Christ was not sufficient, Christ was not adequate, Christ was not enough. They needed to have rationalism. It was Christ plus intellectualism, Christ plus philosophy, it was Christ plus ceremonies and laws and rules and rituals. And it was Christ plus mystical experiences and encounters with angels. And it was Christ plus self-denial, self-abnegation, self-affliction, self-mutilation. They were very intimidated. So Paul writes this epistle to them to tell them it's Christ plus nothing and to show the lie of these heresies.

The great beginning of his argument is in chapter 1 verse 14 where Paul says, "In whom...that is in Christ, referred to as His dear Son in verse 13...in whom we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins, who is the image of the invisible God, the prototokosof all creation, that is the supreme one of all those ever created." And, of course, in His physical body there was creation. "For by Him were all things created that are in heaven and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones or dominions, or principalities or powers, all things were created by Him and for Him and He is before all things and by Him all things consist." Do you notice all the uses of the word all? The sufficiency of Christ, He's the head of the body of the church who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead that in all things He might have the preeminence, for it pleased the Father that in Him should all fullness dwell. All...all...all...all...all is in Christ.

Chapter 2 verse 3, "In whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." Chapter 2 verse 9, "For in Him dwells all the fullness of the godhead bodily and you are complete in Him who is head of all principality and power." Little wonder in chapter 3 verse 4 he says, "Christ who is our life." He is our life. He's not part of our life. He's not the start of our life. He's not the capstone of our life. He is our life.

Colossians were being told that they needed something more than just Jesus Christ to know God, something more than just Jesus Christ to be whole people, something more than just Jesus Christ to defeat the powers of sin, the powers of the demon world, something more than just Jesus Christ to have salvation, something more than just Jesus Christ to have true spirituality. Christ was not sufficient. And so, Paul just loads his gun with a whole lot of alls and starts firing them at them. The

all sufficient Christ.

It's well that we focus on that as we look at this second chapter. The lack of sufficiency in Christ, according to these heretics, could be made up by four things: rationalism, legalism, mysticism, or asceticism....rationalism, legalism, mysticism or asceticism. Rationalism means human wisdom, philosophy. Legalism means ceremony, ritual, religious routine. Mysticism means supernatural experiences, paranormal experiences, visions. And asceticism means physical self-denial. And the particular heresy in Colossae was saying that all of these things are necessary for complete spiritual life and for a right relationship to God. Christ is not sufficient. It is one of the deceptive ploys of Satan, not to deny outwardly the person of Christ, not to attack overtly the person of Christ, but simply to try to demonstrate that Christ is not enough, that He's insufficient.

Let's look at these four areas. First of all, in verse 8 the Apostle Paul answers those who say it's Christ plus rationalism...Christ plus your mind...Christ plus human reason...Christ plus philosophy. Verse 8 says, "Keep on being aware," it's a present tense, always be alert to the fact, "beware lest any man spoil you." Sulagogeomeans to carry off booty, kidnap you, plunder you, seduce you, haul you away as a captive to their thinking. Don't let anybody take you captive through philosophy, and it can be translated, which is vain deceit. Philosophy, even vain deceit, it is deceitful, it is useless, philosophy. What is philosophy? Wisdom of man, study of man's wisdom.

I took a lot of philosophy in college and I look back particularly to a course I took in advance European philosophy. And as I was taking that class, I was amazed because the basic attitude of the academic environment toward philosophers is that they are the utter elite of mankind, that they are the scintillating intellects of the world and that the rest of us are nothing but peons down on some mean level who cannot grasp these great concepts. And so there's a certain sense in which everybody studying philosophy is intimidated right out of their socks by the mental capabilities of philosophers. The first thing that intimidates you is that you really don't understand what they're talking about...until you realize that they didn't either, you're going to be intimidated.

But we are a world that gives great great attention to the mind, to the intellect. And we are all often intimidated by that as if simple faith in Jesus Christ is not enough. There's something in philosophy and psychology and something in human reason that embellishes Christ. That, my dear friends, is liberal theology. To the liberals, they don't deny Christ, it's just that Christ, those who believe only in Christ are sort of peabrains, you know, anti-intellectual. They laugh at us because of the simplicity of our faith that Jesus Christ is all sufficient for all the spiritual needs of every man and woman, both in time and eternity. And they purvey the idea that Christ is apart but beyond that there's this endless verbosity about life and truth and morality and solutions to man's dilemmas that comes out of their brains that's supposed to be erudite and all solving.

It's interesting to me, I was thinking about this as I was preparing for today, that we don't even have much classic philosophy left to speak of...most classic philosophy is in the past and is rehashed and reread. Our philosophers today are the media people. They're the ones articulating the solution to the human problem today. And they're anything but classic philosophers. Those are the kind of philosophers we have today. It's the body, body, body, body, body. It's feel good, feel good, feel good, feel good time so nobody is cognitive. We're not producing philosophers who are spinning off musings out of their mind, we live in the pragmatic body cult era when all we want to know is about feeling. So we have a raft of philosophers who are giving man a raison d'etre, a reason to be in terms of how they feel and expressing their passions and lusts and desires, and that's the new philosophy. And so, of course, Christ can't intrude on that. You can have Christ, but if you really want to live it up, you've got to have this, too.

It's just that always man is convoluting truth, the simple truth of Christ by adding his own reasonings. And the reasoning of man is bankrupt of any truth morally, any truth spiritually. Purveyors of human wisdom have been around since the beginning and they're here today and they want us to believe that Christ is not enough. And if you have this simple childlike faith that embraces Christ, you're some kind of mindless person, some kind of anti-intellectual person, common, mean, unsophisticated. That's very intimidating. That comes against young people in the educational environment all the time. That comes at the seminary level all the time. One of the things I'm so excited about in the Master's Seminary is that we are committed that our men are going to be men of God who are men totally trained in the Word of God and the world can sit out there and say we're anti- intellectual if they'd like, we don't really mind. They can say whatever they want, we're going to be true to the Word of God. And that's under attack.

So, look at verse 8. Paul says, "Beware lest any man carry you off captive with some human reasoning that is nothing more than vain deceit, or an empty lie, or an utter delusion, after the tradition of men, that is a result of the inadequate human thinking process, after the rudiments of the world." Rudiments mean the basic elements of learning, the ABCs. What he's really saying, it's nothing more than human baby talk. We think that the world's philosophers and the world's thinkers and these people articulating all of the answers to all of man's needs are the bright and the brilliant and the surpassing and the highest level and the ones who are really the elite. And the fact is he says they're the ones who are messing with the ABCs, stuff that is so basic and so rudimentary that it isn't even adequate for adults. The truth of the matter is, you and I possess the knowledge of God which is infinitely higher than the knowledge of man, and at best, all that man can come up with his wisdom is foolishness, right? First Corinthians 1.

Rather than advancing human wisdom, rather than advancing the mind, wordly philosophy regresses away from mature truth to the infantile babblings of little infants, poverty opinions of puny minds that go nowhere near the ultimate truth of God which is the highest and surpassing of all truth which believers have already attained in Christ. The great incomprehensible mind of Christ is revealed to

us in the Word of God and through the Spirit of God, not because we're brilliant but because we believe. So when somebody comes along and says, "Well, Christ is a good starting point but you need more than that, you need human reason and human solutions and philosophy," that's not an advanced perspective, that's not a more deep and profound insight, it's just the opposite, it's infantile. It goes backwards. Why do you want to be captive to baby talk when you can ascend to the profound truth of God? You see? "For in Him," verse 9 says, "dwells all the fullness, all the pleromaof the godhead, all the pleromaof God dwells in Christ bodily in the incarnation." It was all there. The amazing God-Man, and you, verse 10, are complete in Him. Isn't that marvelous? All the pleromaof God is in Christ and Christ is in you and you are complete in that. What can human wisdom about meaning add to that? What can human wisdom about morality add to that? What can human wisdom about purpose add to that? What can human wisdom about life, love, death, what can human wisdom about anything add to that? What lack in their spiritual life do Christians need help with from the world? None.

So, don't believe for any moment that when you come and receive Jesus Christ that's some kind of starting point and you've got to accumulate a whole bunch of other stuff out of the world to round out your life. From the spiritual dimension, He is all we need, He is utterly sufficient, who is...it says in verse 10...the head of all principality and power, all the highest beings created. Those are names of angels. He is over all of them. His knowledge surpasses human knowledge, it surpasses supernatural knowledge and the best that men can do is infantile.

You want to know the truth, folks? We are the elite of the world intellectually. We have the mind of Christ, right? Who know God in Christ. We know the truth. I know the truth about values, I know the truth about morality. I know the truth from the standpoint of life. I know the truth from the standpoint of death. I know what is right. I know what is wrong. I know what makes people happy, what makes them sad. I know where joy is found, peace is found, hope is found, truth is found, and so do you, right? And you didn't get that by getting a Ph.D. You got it by receiving Christ. It's all available to you because Christ comes to us in His person and He comes to us through His Word and by His Spirit, and the combination is to have the wisdom of God. Christ is made unto us, 1 Corinthians 1:30, wisdom...wisdom. He's all we need in the spiritual sense. I'm not going to say that being a Christian is going to effect you in every dimension of life, but in the spiritual dimension, He's all we need. He provides, verse 11 and 12 say, He provides complete salvation. We are circumcised, that is there's a cleansing, symbolized in circumcision, but not with hands. In other words, not a physical circumcision, but a putting off of the body of the sins of the flesh.

In other words, Christ comes to us and takes away the sins of the flesh. We're delivered from them. How? By being immersed with Him into His own death and resurrection, verse 12 says. Buried with Him in baptism in which you're risen through the faith of the operation of God who has raised Him from the dead. When you believe in Christ you're placed into His death and resurrection, as you know, and through that death and that new life comes complete salvation. Transformation from death

to life. You're alive to God. You understand God. You hear His voice. You know what He says.

The natural man doesn't. The natural man doesn't understand the things of God. He's a corpse. You can scream at a corpse till you're blue in the face, he won't hear. You give him life and he'll hear. God has given us life and we hear His voice and we understand what He says. Complete salvation, complete forgiveness in verses 13 and 14. Even though we were dead in sins and uncircumcision of flesh, He made us alive together with Him, that is with Christ, having forgiven you all trespasses. And then verse 14, one of the great verses in all the epistles, blotting out, the word means to erase or wipe off. In those days when a scribe wrote he wrote on papyrus which was made from reeds, paper made from reeds, or he wrote on velum which was made from animal skin. The ink didn't have acid so when he wrote the ink would sit right on top of the velum or on top of the papyrus. And if he wanted to use it again he could take something wet and wipe it off and reuse it because it was costly. And the picture here is of a wiping off. And what was wiped off? The handwriting of laws that was against us, which was contrary to us, He took it out of the way, nailing it to His cross.

The picture is very vivid. There was a list of crimes that was put on the cross of a crucified victim that showed everybody why he was crucified. Paul says the list of crimes that nailed Jesus to the cross were not His crimes, but whose? Ours. And the idea here is a self-signed, self-confessed debt of sin was nailed to the cross, was the list of crimes for which He died. And by His death He erased that list. So we have in Christ complete salvation, complete forgiveness.

And then he says in verse 15, complete victory because He spoiled, conquered, principalities and powers, meaning demon hosts, made a show of them openly. I believe He descended into the lower parts and down there proclaimed His triumph over them. He showed the demons on earth and the demons in the pit bound that He had won the victory openly, triumphing over them in His death. So when we receive Christ, we receive complete salvation. That is deliverance from the flesh and the power of sin and some day the presence of sin. We receive complete forgiveness for all of the things that we've done to violate the law of God. And we receive complete victory over the powers of the demon world, the fallen world, the hosts of hell. That's sufficiency.

Human philosophy adds nothing to that. Human reason adds nothing to that. Human sociology, psychology, philosophy add nothing to that. And we must realize that whereas man may teach us some things helpful about life in this world, they offer nothing to make up some lack of Christ. Christ is sufficient to make us wise so that John says we need not that any man should teach us. Human wisdom has no application to our spiritual life.

Secondly, the attack comes from legalism, not just rationalism. Paul says in verse 16, "Don't let anyone therefore condemn you," the word condemn rather than judge gives the idea, "don't let anyone therefore condemn you in food or in drink or in respect of a feastday or of the new moon or of a sabbath day which are a shadow of things to come, but the body or the reality that casts the

shadow is Christ."

Now this is the religion of human achievement again through legalism. There are people who want us to believe that you believe in Christ...yes, but you do this, you do this, you do this, you do this...you go through all these rituals and Christ plus nothing won't get you there, it's Christ plus legalism. Legalism is just a word that means keeping rules and laws and outward ceremonies to gain favor with God.

I remember on a Sunday night a young man came here after I preached and spoke to me and told me this personal testimony. He was a jazz drummer and he had gone on that very morning, Sunday morning, to his Catholic Church. And he had felt tremendous guilt over sins. And as a Catholic he felt the way to get relief from guilt was to go to confession. And so he went and asked that a priest would go in the booth and hear his confession. And he confessed all of his sins. And he said, "I want to be delivered from the guilt of these." And the priest said, "Take your beads," and I think it was the number 35, "go say 35 Hail Marys."

So he went over to the altar and he said to me, "I said several Hail Marys, and I stood up and I took my beads and I threw them as hard as I could and as far as I could across the church and walked out." Somehow in the wonderful providence of God, he found his way to the service here on that Sunday night, heard the message of Jesus Christ and was wonderfully saved. And he said to me, he said, "I knew that all of that was doing nothing to deal with the guilt of my sin." It wasn't that he didn't believe in Christ, it was that he was told that Christ was not enough, that you couldn't just expect Christ to forgive your sin, you had to do something, something religious. This is so prominent in ceremonial ritualistic systems, in self-righteous works systems. People who would believe in Christ and then try to earn their way into the kingdom.

With the Jews, of course, it had to do with the Old Testament. They had dietary laws, food and drink laws. But by now in the new covenant with the coming of Christ those laws were set aside. You say, "Well what were those laws for in the first place?" Well, the dietary laws and the feast laws and the ceremonies of Israel were symbols, they weren't spiritual realities, they were simply illustrations of a spiritual truth. But primarily, I just want you to know, that God gave them all those unique living habits for the primary reason to make their life so unusual, their diet so unusual, their behavior so unusual that it was difficult for them to interact with the pagan nations around them. You have to remember that when God put His people in the land, they were an island in the midst of a cess pool of paganism. They had invaded pagan territory. And the fear, of course, was that their purity would be totally destroyed by the encroaching paganism, like planting a delicate flower in the midst of a weed field.

And so, God built insulation around them in dietary laws and in behavioral laws that made it almost impossible for them to interact with other people on a social level, to protect them. And those were

symbols, symbols of spiritual things. They were opportunities for obedience to God. But there came a time when God set all of those symbols aside in the coming of Jesus Christ. And in Mark 7 is a monumental statement, "Nothing going into the mouth of a man defiles the man." That is a shocking statement, Mark 7:14 and 15. Because the Jews had always believed that there were certain things going in that did defile and Jesus there is saying it's a new day, folks, defilement doesn't come dietarily anymore. And in Acts 10 He says to Peter, "Rise, Peter, kill and eat," and there's a whole lot of unclean animals on a sheet in his vision, "and don't you ever call anymore unclean what God has now sanctified." And here comes the culmination of it, "Don't let anybody condemn you because of your diet, because you don't keep a feastday, because you don't celebrate a new moon, because you don't observe the sabbath, those were a shadow, the reality is now here." And the reality is faith in Christ. The reality is Christ.

Don't let anybody tell you it's Christ plus your beads, Christ plus your candles, Christ plus your holy underwear, like Mormon people wear, or Christ plus service, or Christ plus baptism, or Christ plus observing the seventh day of the week, or Christ plus fasting, or Christ plus anything like that. There are today many people who would advocate that. And not only are they in cults and false religions, but they're even quote/unquote in evangelical Christianity, or even fundamental Christianity. Listen, I believe that churches like ours are full of people who believe their salvation is attached to how often they read the Bible, pray and go to church. Or they're confidence in their salvation is attached to the fact that they don't do certain things and they don't go certain places. Or, they do do certain things and they do go certain places. And they're not really trusting in the all-sufficient Christ, they're trusting because they believe in Christ in that plus their religious activities.

That's not anything new. So Paul says, "Look, don't let anybody hold you to some dietary laws, don't let anybody tell you you can't eat pork or you can't eat this or you can't eat that. Don't let anybody hold you to some feastday which has to do with the annual festivals, Passover, Pentecost, Feast of Tabernacles, Feast of Lights, Leviticus 23. Don't let anybody hold you to the new moon, which was a special sacrifice always offered on the first day of every month, according to Numbers 28:11 to 14. Don't let anybody hold you to observance of the sabbath, as if that's how you attain a right relationship to God." Gentiles never did observe those things and now they're trying to impose them on Gentiles. There's no point in that. It's not what you do on the outside, it's the change that Christ has made on the inside that makes you right with God. All those things are a shadow, just a shadow. And a shadow only portends of someone to come. You see the shadow and you look further and there's the person. And once the person is there, you don't care about the shadow. You don't embrace the shadow, you embrace the person. Think of it. Why would you regard as indispensable such ordinances as eating when one who foreshadowed them who is the true bread of life is come? How can the observance of Passover be considered a means of spiritual perfection when our Passover is Christ and He lives within us? And why would we demand that people keep some Jewish sabbath law when we have entered into eternal rest? So it goes.

And I am, to be honest with you, somewhat weary of the battle against those who want to make spirituality directly related to certain kinds of behavior. And I'm not talking about moral issues, I'm just talking about certain religious behavior. Spurgeon put it one time, "Would you be a Christian if there were no eleven o'clock Sunday morning service?" Is that all of Christianity that you experience? True spirituality is evaluated by the inside, not the outside. The inside not the outside.

And yet there are people who will evaluate their spirituality on the things they don't do, the things they do which are just preferential. There are people who believe they must be Christians because they sit at home on the sabbath and because they don't play cards. Things like that. I remember that because that's the way it was when I was a kid. But he says it's Christ plus nothing. It's not Jesus Christ is a good starting point and if you can get your life together you might make it in the kingdom. Jesus Christ is a good beginning but if you keep the rules, you'll get there. No, it's Christ plus nothing. Don't let anybody intimidate you.

You say, "Well, does that mean we can do anything?" Of course not. You can't disobey what Scripture says and you don't want to do anything to offend a weaker brother. So there are restrictions on our liberty but our relationship to God is predicated on not some kind of religious behavior or some kind of disdain for certain non-moral things, or some kind of fundamental culture that we live in but based upon our relationship to Christ alone.

So, Paul is saying, "Look, don't let anybody tell you Christ plus some human stuff, Christ plus some ritual rules you have to keep." Do you realize that the world is full of people like that who believe in Jesus but don't think He's enough and so they're trying to amass all the answers to all of life's issues and try to really draw in all the human wisdom they can to attain to a certain level where they'll be acceptable? And do you know, as well as I do, there are people who are literally up to their eyebrows in world kind of religions and cults and occults and branches and Christianity both Catholic and Protestant, of course, that are trying to earn their way to heaven? Yes, they believe in Christ...one Christ or another, either the one of their own definition or even the biblical one, but He's not sufficient and so they have to do religious things.

And then thirdly, and we're moving quickly, verse 18, Paul says don't let anybody intimidate you with mysticism, telling you that Christ is not enough, you need Christ plus some other experience. Now let me tell you what mysticism is, okay? Mysticism is a deeper higher religious experience based on personal intuition. Did you get that? Mysticism is a deeper higher religious experience based on personal intuition. You know what it really is? Nothing, absolutely nothing. Mysticism is nothing. It's just something you think is something. It is not what you think it is. And yet people think it is what they think it is. People came along to the Colossians and they said there's a higher, there is an ascending, there is a surpassing, there is a paranormal, there is a supernatural, a higher, deeper, spiritual knowledge, there is a mystical piety, there is a plain of humility connected with aeons and

angels and demigods and emanations and we need to ascend to that level.

Verse 18, let me give you the New American Standard because it's a very difficult verse to translate from the original. The NAS has captured it. "Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize, take away your reward, by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of 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 all the body by joints and bands having nourishment and knit together increases with the increase of God." And that all means that Christ is the one who really builds the body, don't let anybody beguile you, woo you, deceive you, deny you your reward by engulfing you in some...some delightful self-abasement, which means a proud humility and the worship of angels, taking his stand on visions he has seen which do nothing but inflate without any cause his fleshly mind.

It's a big ego trip, Paul says. All these people who are into mysticism, it's coming at us like a flood, folks, like a flood. All the mysticism that's encroaching upon the church, this New Wave interest in missions where they're saying we'll never reach the world without signs and wonders. And they're having courses in seminary on miracles and signs and wonders. And they're teaching people how to get into the other dimension, how to get into the other paradigm, they use that term of the third world, and think mystically. And it's nothing, it's nothing but sheer imagination at best and at worst you are courting demons...courting demons. It's just not true.

A man said to me, "Sometimes when I'm shaving, Jesus comes in the bathroom and puts His arm around me in the morning and talks to me." I said, "You mean the real Jesus?" He said yes. I said, "And He puts His arm around you and you see Him?" He said yes. And I just had one question, "Do you keep shaving or do you fall on your face in the ground in terror because you're in the presence of a holy God?" If you keep shaving, it wasn't Jesus. He said, "Do you believe that?" I said, "No, I don't believe it but what's worse, I believe you believe it." That's mysticism. It's nothing but you believe it's something.

And some people, sad to say, it's not enough to believe in Christ, they pursue the paranormal, the supernatural, the mystical, the intuitive and they make things happen in the mind that aren't happening and they open themselves to things that do happen from demonic sources. It's a frightening thing to think about, frightening.

Did you read in the paper yesterday about Oral Roberts? Did you read that what happened was the other day the devil came in his room and while he was laying in bed the devil got both hands on his neck and the devil was trying to strangle him to death. And he had to call Evelyn to come and get the devil off him. And so he called her and she came and got rid of the devil. Folks, if that's true, we should be listening to Evelyn, not Oral. I mean, you understand that, don't you?

Why is it that people pursue that? I'll tell you why. Because somewhere in their theology they have bought into the fact that it's not enough to have Christ. And they're into all these experience with angels and so forth. I remember when we tried to get some quotes out of a book written by the Hunters, they wouldn't let us quote, I wanted to quote them in the Charismatic book, but they had a whole thing in there from their book about they were flying into Chicago and the wings were wobbling and while they were flying in there they were so nervous because the wings were wobbling, and I figured that happens about every time I fly into Chicago, but this was bothering then. And they just cried out to God and they looked out the window and there was this big angel who flew right up and just grabbed that wing and stabalized that thing. And, you know, they went on to describe all this and how many different times. And a guy up in Idaho wrote this entire book about all these angels doing this and doing that and experiencing this and experiencing that and I really personally believe for one that God doesn't send His holy angels in visible ways to reinforce people whose theology is aberrant.

Secondly, I mean I've been serving the Lord a long time and there may have been some angels around but I haven't been aware of them. I just think there are people whose faith...that's not great faith that brings those supernatural experiences, that's doubt looking for proof that fantasizes those experiences. Mysticism is nothing but the indiscreet action of a fallen intuition...or at worse, demonic. But there are people running around intimidating the socks off Christian people because they're not having those experiences. You're not having a miracle? In fact, the latest thing that Mr. Roberts said was that if you don't send me money you're not going to get a miracle. Well who...who would be intimidated enough to buy into that? I'll tell you who, lots of folks who send millions of dollars to buy a miracle. They line up. They say this is great faith, you have to have great faith. It's not great faith, it's great distrust in the sufficiency of Christ and the sufficiency of His Word. And you usher yourself into a very very very dangerous environment. The environment of human imagination is dangerous enough but when it gets tangled up with the demonic forces of the other world it's even more frightening.

No, there's no higher plain. There is no surpassing experience. There is no deeper life. Christ is all and all. These people do this, it says, because they delight in humility and all it does is puff up their fleshly mind. Isn't that a tragic diagnosis? But that's a fact. Christ is not enough. Supposed humility is nothing but ugly pride...worshiping angels, seeking visions, building everything on these kinds of mystical experiences strikes a blow against the sufficiency of Jesus Christ. They're not holding fast to the head who is Christ. He's the one from whom the entire body supported and held together by joints and ligaments grows with a growth that is from God. You want to grow you grow because you hang on closely to Christ. He's all you need. It isn't, "Well, let's receive Christ and, boy, let's hope that we don't get stuck at that level."

I was speaking one time...I was asked to speak to a group of people on the subject of my belief on tongues because they had the assumption that somehow I had gotten the gift of tongues. And I don't know how they got that but they asked me to speak to a luncheon about 300 men. And they were so

happy to have me there and they introduced me and I thought they wanted me to speak on what I believe the Bible teaches about tongues. And so I thought they were wanting another view to just know the other side. This was at a restaurant in Glendale. Jay was with me. So I went in and I stood up and took my Bible and I just took off. And you should have...things began to move on the table and shaking things and they were moving around and it seemed a little bit strange but I just kept pumping and pumping. Finally, this is the only time it ever happened in my life, I felt someone grab my coat and he pulled me down, away and down into a chair right in the middle of what I was saying and then pushed me aside and got up and said, "Well, I'll just tell you this, we regret this..." something to that effect.

But I'll never forget what he said. I don't know the exact words but it went like this, I think, Jay, you'll remember. "All we can do is pray that some time in the middle of the night...remember that?...God zaps you and you come rising out of your bed to speak in a heavenly language." Frankly, I'd rather have the sleep, you know.

You understand...do you understand I'm not seeking that? I'm not trying to be ungracious but I'm just telling you Christ is sufficient and I don't need to see angels, and I don't need to have visions and I don't need to rise to some higher level, some deeper life, some other plain, I have more in the sufficiency of Christ than I can even commit myself to.

By the way, I did get back up and say I wasn't quite finished.

There's a final thought here. It has to do with asceticism. Asceticism...you say, what is that? The dictionary says asceticism is living a life of rigorous self-denial. Living a life of rigorous self-denial. One time when I was preaching over there in the Family Center before we had this auditorium, some of you remember this, I was toward the end of my message and a man walked up on the platform, that's happened about a half a dozen times in the years I've been here, and just kind of said, "I have something to say...I have something to say...I have something to say," he said it right out loud. And then he just began to yell at the top of his voice, "You people are phonies, you people are materialistic, you...if you really knew God you'd get rid of all your cars and all your fancy houses," and he went on and on, I don't know exactly the words but that was his whole speech.

And there was nothing I could do but just stand there and let him say what he said and, of course, he just finished in a matter of a few moments and the ushers took him out. And that was his view of spirituality...having one suit of clothes and riding a bicycle...it's Christ plus a bicycle...Christ plus give away everything you have to the poor and, you know, live as a hermit. Christ plus put rocks in your shoes. Did you know the monks used to do that, put rocks in their shoes? You know, they would wear a belt that had little sharp pieces of metal in it so it would cut their stomach all the time all day long? That's asceticism.

So he says in verse 20, "Therefore, wherefore if you're dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, if you've died to all that, why in the world are you going back into the world and all of their silly ABCs of religion such as these ordinances and commandments and doctrines of men like touch not, taste not, handle not." In other words, spiritually is tied...spirituality is tied to abstinence. Don't touch that, don't taste that, don't get married, you know, sexual abstinence and that still exists, doesn't it? We still have residue of that in the religions of our country, that spirituality is connected to never marrying. You stay away from certain things, a meager diet. In other words, you strip yourself down to almost nakedness and you live in abject poverty and total self-denial, inflict pain on your body and that's what makes you acceptable to God. And that comes out of a Greek dualism that says the body is evil and so you deny the body everything.

Some of the monks thought it was a sin to bathe because they would see themselves naked and the longer they held to that theology, the smaller and smaller their circle of acquaintances became. And their influence went with it. Others felt that marriage was an experiment of the serpent which separated from the Lord. Athanasius boasted of the devotion of a man named Anthony who never changed his vest and never washed his feet. And that was praise worthy. And Antonius proudly related that such was the holy asceticism of Simeon Stiletus(?) that when he walked, vermin dropped off his body. That's holiness in that perspective.

Do you remember at Christmas time the guy in the Philippines who crucifies himself every year? And the Flagellantes who beat themselves raw on their backs till they bleed in order to effect some penance toward God so God will accept them. We've died to all that stuff. If God blesses us, then He blesses us and we accept His blessing with thankfulness and we use it to enjoy His goodness and to share with others in need. And we are not made more spiritual by deprivation. He says in verse 22, "All these things are going to perish." Verse 23 he says, I'll give you a good translation of it, again it's hard to translate, "Regulations of this kind, these things, though to be sure having a reputation for wisdom because of their self-made design, their self-made humility and unsparing treatment of the body are of no real value whatever, serving only to indulge the flesh." Ooh, isn't that good? That just indulges the flesh, that just makes you proud to be humble, proud to be humble, self-styled ritual religion, some kind of phony apparent piety and supernatural experiences, self-denial that appears to be abject, poverty, all these do is elevate the flesh, indulge the flesh, lift up pride and make you proud about all your sacrifices, all your visions, all your spiritual achievements. And they take away from Christ. All your human reason, and they take away from Christ.

I understand this intimidation. I have been long and often called anti-intellectual. I have been criticized because I believe in the sufficiency of Scripture, the sufficiency of spiritual resources and the sufficiency of Christ. And I don't feel that in order to do spiritual work we need human wisdom. I have been criticized very often by people who would demand a certain external legalism, who would criticize me for the fact that I don't do certain things that they think are spiritual behaviors. I've

certainly been criticized because I haven't ascended to the highest level of spiritual experience and had visions and supernatural paranormal experiences. I have been told that I just will never reach that plain with my present mindset.

I was listening to a radio program the other day where they were discussing me on a talk show. And one guy...one guy...they were reviewing my book on the Charismatic Movement and one reviewer read through a little of it and the comment of the other one was, "Well I don't know who this man is but I'll tell you one thing, God will never bless his life." Well I don't know what you call blessing, but I don't know that I could handle much more than God has graciously given. I don't really care to go to heaven and come back and tell about it, or go to hell and come back and tell about it. I don't really care to know all of worldly wisdom, I'm not really concerned with that. I'm not concerned that I try to please God with a whole lot of self- designed rituals and rules. I'm certainly not concerned that in order to gain God's favor I've got to deny myself all the great and wonderful and kind things that God has done for me. My confidence and my faith all rest in one person, who is that? Jesus Christ. And I believe with all my heart, not because of me, but because of His sovereign and infinite grace I am complete in Him. I hope you believe that, too. Let's bow together in prayer.

Listen carefully, would you please, for a moment to this. In Christ I find the source of all earth's loving, the universe of peace and trust divine. I find the satisfaction borne of knowing forever I am His and He is mine. In Christ I find a harbor from the tempest, a refuge safe to guard throughout the test. I find in Him a shelter from the darkness as safely in His arms my soul does rest. In Christ I find the bread that leaves no hunger, the wine that leaves no thirst within the heart. I find the warmth of love that Jesus gives, the blessing of its riches to impart. In Christ I find an endless realm of beauty, a garden cool, assuaging sorted heat, I find a matchless wonder of His presence as I in prayer abide at Jesus' feet. In Christ I find the greatest human treasures, the washing white from sin, salvation free, in Him is found a joy that knows no measure, the gift of one who gave His all for me. In Christ I find all love, all joy, all blessing, I find the peace that shares with doubt no part. In Christ I find the gate to heaven's glory, in Christ the Christ who dwells within my heart.

Father, how thankful we are for the sufficiency of Christ, that in all the complexity of the world, in all the din of voices and words, all the analyses and solutions not withstanding, we are complete in Christ. He is all and all. How we thank Thee. Help us to be content with Him. And discontent until, even as Paul said, we are fully formed into His image. Help us to seek Him, to know Him, to love Him, to be like Him.

While your heads are bowed for just a closing moment. Are you resting, trusting, living and even facing death in the confidence of the sufficiency of Christ? Are you? Is Christ all and all to you? Christ plus nothing? O I trust you say yes to that. If so, thank Him for His grace. If the answer is no, if you've been trusting in human wisdom or some kind of religious works, or looking for some kind of supernatural experience, if you've been thinking that your own self-denial and self-imposed pain could

in some way gain you favor with God, put it all aside and in simple childlike faith embrace the living, dying, risen Christ as your Savior and He brings complete salvation, complete forgiveness, complete victory for you are complete in Him. All you need in the spiritual dimension for time and eternity He gives. And by faith you receive. Open your heart to Him.

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