

Ablazing Grace



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Christian Mysticism?

This past December 26th, I dreamt that I was in the middle of a small circle leading spontaneous worship, when I began to prophesy. At one point, I said "Now listen ..." as if to say, "God is emphasizing this part: *'In the days ahead, there will be things that happen that will be astounding and even spectacular, so you will need to be in the Word like never before.'*" This was a very encouraging dream, particularly in light of certain things I had been musing, but it was only the beginning of the dream. I will write about the latter part of the dream towards the end of this article, and am purposely saving it until then.

John Paul Jackson of Streams Ministries is a mentor of mine, and one of my favorite channels on his website, www.streamsministries.com, is called The Convergence Council. Before we flew out of the country for Christmas to visit my husband's family, I remembered to watch the latest installment of one of the ministers who'd graced the platform with his portion for the Council. Well, I got "installed" all right, by watching the December 12th, 15 minute 31 second video of a speaker who wonderfully and unexpectedly ... wrecked me. It is not as dramatic as it might sound because my spirit was completely ready for it and absorbed it like a sponge; my soul, however, wanted to retreat, and I have been bringing it under subjection ever since. In a world full of political correctness and offense and debate over homosexuality, racism, socialism, and Obamacare—the last thing I expected to fill my holiday was study over the issue of what I refer to as *Christian mysticism*. But there it was, in my lap like a ton of bricks; and I was happy about it! "Thank God," I thought. "Finally, some legitimization for what God has done in the Spirit, is doing in the Spirit, and is going to do in much greater measures." This article is a cursory view of an inexhaustible subject, but I am eager to put my spoon into the ocean to see what swirls around.

What is Christian Mysticism?

To begin with, I define Christian mysticism as the belief that a person can directly commune with and experience God in heaven in a literal manner based upon Scripture and the Passion of Jesus Christ to reconcile His creation back to the Father. Christian mysticism is the enlivening of the Word of God in a Believer's walk, and it is the closest positioning to the Garden of Eden one can experience since the fall.ⁱ It involves a more literal rendering of Scriptures which encourage encountering God as in Psalm 27:4-8, where David *sought* the face of God, John 14:21, where keeping God's commandments causes Jesus to *manifest* Himself; and Genesis 5:24, where a translation occurs, "*Enoch walked with God, and was not, for God took Him.*"ⁱⁱ

For the Christian mystic (sometimes called ecstasies), biblical metaphors and similes are exchanged for actual, supernatural occurrences and spectacular experiences in the Spirit. These biblical tangibles might manifest themselves through transportations (also called transrelocations) like Elijah in the Old Testament, and Philip the Evangelist in the New, or an

interaction with the Cloud of Witnesses as Jesus experienced on the Mount of Transfiguration, or receiving an angelic visitation through a spiritual dream or an open vision. The Bible is replete with these types of occurrences, but the ultimate goal of the Christian Mystic is to *experience deep oneness and intimacy with God*. I liken it to being married and choosing either to have an uneventful, surface relationship with one's spouse, or choosing to be deeply in love and engaged in continual union and oneness. Does this sound too fanciful? Perhaps envisioning marriage in this way does, but I believe the goal of the Cross and the reason the word "passion" is used to describe what Jesus went through for us was to restore to us the ecstasy of knowing God as Father and Supreme Being. When I was in Seminary, words like "ecstasy" and "mystical" were reserved for 16th century Catholics like St. Teresa de Ávila or St. John of the Cross. Some Pentecostals from the Latter Rain Movement or the Manifest Sons of God, and maybe even a few Charismatics were referred to as mystics, but as far as the academy was concerned, our thought processes did not venture into the discovery of modern-day ecstasies.

What of Christian Mysticism?

This brings me to the next point in my conversation, which is to ask, "So, what of Christian Mysticism?" In other words, "*Why does any of this matter, and what am I to do with it?*" For starters, the reason this matters is because it is happening in people's lives, and it is happening on the earth today. My personal experience with all of this has not been as frequent as I would like, but I passed a comforting test on December 9, 2009, when during a spiritual vision with my eyes closed, I saw the wings of the Heavenly Father as I watched His form walk out from behind a curtain and sit on His throne. Apparently, I was in the Spirit, because I then saw myself standing on His lap, and I saw the feathers of one of His wings. I was amazed, and the first words that flew out of my mouth were, "*I need Scripture! I need Scripture!*" At the time, the only Scripture I could remember that attributed wings to deity was found in Malachi 4:2, "But to you who fear My name, The Sun of Righteousness shall arise With healing in His wings." Even then, I did not have chapter or verse for it; I simply remembered the phrase, "*healing in His wings.*" After it happened, though, the study began, and I found scriptures which I believe are beyond the metaphorical devices of personification and allegory, but have a literal application:

How precious *is* Your lovingkindness, O God! Therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of Your **wings**. (Psalm 37:6)

Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me! For my soul trusts in You; And in the shadow of Your **wings** I will make my refuge, Until *these* calamities have passed by. (Psalm 57:1b)

I will abide in Your tabernacle forever; I will trust in the shelter of Your **Wings**. Selah. (Psalm 61:4)

He shall cover you with His **feathers**, And under His **wings** you shall take Refuge. (Psalm 91:4)

I also searched the Word regarding scriptures where someone saw God's form. Below are references speaking of Moses in Numbers and Isaiah's vision of the Lord on a throne:

I speak with him face to face, Even plainly, and not in dark sayings;
And he sees the **form** of the LORD. (Numbers 12:8a)

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high
and lifted up (Isaiah 6:1)

The exam I passed was the test of seeking to know whether a spiritual experience measures up with the godly foundation set in my life as a child and young Christian—is there scriptural precedent for it and does it line up with the integrity and the authority of the Bible? When this happened (and while this was not the first time something of this nature happened to me, it was the first in a long time where I did not understand it Wings??? I mean, come on!) my faithful Baptist background and my Word of Faith Christian-coming-of-age, kicked in. Now—my heart and life have been enhanced and encouraged because of the revelation of the healing power and the shelter of my Heavenly Father's wings. Years ago, my initial response to these types of testimonies would have been a combination of intrigue and doubt, which is not altogether incorrect. Healthy questioning and inquiry are wise, but because I love the Word of God, and I seek to please and to know Him more—I adhere to the Apostle John's prescription when he says:

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. (I John 4:1-3a)

For decades, and even as recently as last October during John MacArthur's Strange Fire Conference, the church has been divided over the issues of cessationism vs. continuationism.¹ The irony is that the things which disturb detractors of the Charismatic Movement are only the floor for where some foresee as the horizon of a Mystical Movement within the Church. (Get ready for more conferences like last October) While others may wrestle with this "angel," what I have wrestled with is, "Do I *fully* embrace what God is revealing and doing in His Word and in His kingdom in this day and in this hour? The answer for me is "yes," but I believe there are some caveats as well as some encouragements to be addressed.

Caveats

Number 1: Eschew the term "extra-biblical." I have never liked this term and almost rejected this entire subject matter, out of hand, because of it. I find it offensive. It simply means

¹ "Cessationism versus Continuationism." *Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia*. Wikipedia Foundation, Inc. 16 Nov. 2013. Web. 1 Jan. 2014 <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cessationism_versus_Continuationism>

“outside of the Bible”², and the last thing any leader or minister needs to be identified with when making their case for experiencing God are occurrences they cannot find or point to in the Word. Genesis 1:1-3 says:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, and the earth was without form and void; and darkness was on the face of the **deep**. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. Then God said, “Let there be **light**”; and there was **light**.

What I love about this Scripture is the reality of God’s nature to shed light into areas that are “deep” and to bring light in the darkness. In other words, it is okay if our experiences in God are *deep*. God is deep; but 1 John 1:5 says that God IS light. It is not just that God has light, but that God’s very nature is light. He spoke words and separated light from the darkness, and so it is with deep matters of Scripture. When it is a matter of sonship and things involving the meat of the Word, then God’s written Word, Itself, with the Holy Spirit, will shed light and understanding upon Scriptures that have seemed obtuse to us in the past. If not, then abandon the vision as false and the spiritual experience as inauthentic. What other measuring stick do we have? Why would we even speak of such experiences if we do not have biblical witness for them? It is not enough to have someone’s successful book or someone’s famous testimony to confirm a vision. While we will never find a Scripture that says, “marry Bobby”, “marry Shaquita,” or “move to China,” we can find Scriptures on marriage and warnings regarding being unequally yoked. We also know that God told Abram to leave his home in Haran—so in these instances, we have biblical precedents for marriage and for moving away from what we know. The bottom line is this—a mystical/ecstatic experience that is from God will be directly supported by chapter and verse.

Number 2: Avoid “proof texting.” This was the seminarian’s kiss-of-death when I was getting my Master of Divinity degree. We were budding theologians, and almost at every turn, when we were writing papers or preparing sermons, we were warned, and warned again, that other than plagiarism, proof texting was the unpardonable sin. We were challenged to approach every theological proposition with integrity, and if the biblical shoe did not fit—we were not to force it. The funny thing is—I have not used this term or thought about this issue in years. It is not something I find myself challenged with, but because of the dream I had and the exhortation to “be in the Word like never before,”—it is a principle I am allowing myself to revisit with the encouragement that God the Holy Spirit will be the Light to bring needed revelation and understanding to rightly divide His Word.

At this juncture, I want to share the latter part of my dream mentioned in the beginning of this article. After I gave the prophetic word in the dream, but while I prophesied the emphasis to be in the Word, the small circle dispersed and people joyfully went about their business excited about the promise God spoke of for the future—but they didn’t seem to care about the emphasis to be in the Word. I was surprised and disappointed. “Lord?” I thought both in the dream and after I awoke, “Is it my lack of influence, or is it that people don’t sense the urgency to study to show themselves approved?” I am sure it is some combination of both, but I know it is time to *dig deep* in order for us to *go deep*, and yes—I believe God wants us to go deep.

² “Extra-biblical.” All Words. 2 Jan. 2014. Web. <<http://www.allwords.com/word-extra-Biblical.html>>

Encouragements

Number 3: “Is there not a cause?” asked the shepherd boy, David, at the opportunity to kill the giant Philistine, Goliath. I remember a few years ago being able to share a woman’s testimony of seeing loved ones in heaven with a woman whose 19 year old son had died in a canoeing accident. There are few traumas worse than outliving a child. When I sent her the testimony of this woman who was not an apostle and may not even have been in traditional ministry, she responded with gratitude, not because her pain instantly left her—but because she was encouraged and reminded that she will see her son again. Someone’s amazing “trip to heaven” like the Apostle Paul in II Corinthians 12 who was caught up into Paradise, helped a grieving mother. Mystical experiences do not remove pain. They do not prevent us from the injustices of life, and they do not alleviate us from problems. The blessing of tangibility is not about escapism, but it is about ministry and the edification and enhancement of living the Christian life and walking lovingly with our God.

Number 4: My pastor, Robert Morris, wrote a book, *The God I Never Knew: How Real Friendship with the Holy Spirit Can Change Your Life*. Among other things, he decries the notion that the Holy Spirit is “spooky.” The very thought is anathema, and mystics or ecstasies have an opportunity to acknowledge that Christians may be a peculiar people, but we are not weird. In fact, it may even be wiser to emphasize that what this is truly about is *life in the Spirit* according to Romans 7 and 8, and Galatians 5. When Peter calls us “peculiar” in I Peter 2:9, he means, “unusual, an anomaly,” or “out of the ordinary,” and to the world—we are indeed these things. To one another, we are to be encouragers and exhorters. The older should teach the younger and the younger should respect those who have continued on in the faith.

Conclusion

One of the things I enjoyed the most while watching the video about the young man who spoke of his mystical experiences was his penchant for humor. He was full of joy and humility, and he seemed very “normal,” with a house full of screaming kids and messy dishes! Yet, in his walk with God, some amazing things have happened to him, and I believe it is time for the church to expect to see and experience the glory of God and the marks of sonship and mature realities in Jesus Christ. While I ultimately believe our walk with God should be full of His manifested glory with signs and wonders, Christian mysticism should inspire us to be greater worshippers, tithers, and soul-winners. It should also inspire us in paying bills, doing laundry, baking cookies, putting gas in our cars, shoveling snow, returning phone calls, and preparing lessons plans for work (which I will be doing shortly). It is easier to type and write about these expectations and joyful experiences in God than it is to fully share and even to embrace them. I am excited to spend this year enjoying God’s Word and encouraging the Church not only to declare “Maranatha! Come, Lord Jesus!”, but to also entertain the possibility that God may extend an invitation as He did an old apostle named John in Revelation 4:1, “*Come up here*”

ⁱ This definition is a combination of my own language plus Merriam Webster’s Online Dictionary, an Encyclopedia Britannica Company, © 2014.

ⁱⁱ All Scripture verses are taken from the NKJV and words in bold are my emphasis.