

Christian Mysticism HOWTO

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A Foot in Both Worlds

Faith in Christ is not rational. Providing you understand and accept that Western rationalist epistemology is no friend of Christian faith, you still may not be quite ready to operate under Christian Mysticism. How is it different from all that other junk which is called “mysticism”?

This will be brief, and about as practical as possible, given the nature of the subject. Please note: Because too many people cherry pick verses of Scripture without proper context and twist the meaning, like the Pharisees did, I’m not going to quote Bible passages for this exercise. Those with a broad acquaintance with the Bible as a whole will recognize the principles.

Mysticism: The Thing Itself

Perhaps if we demystify the term **mysticism** it might help a bit. In essence, mysticism posits there are valid ways to arrive at a decision about things without confining yourself to pure logic. Perhaps you are aware of folks who have some oddball talent for something really useful or artistic which does not require they think consciously, but simply act? They didn’t have to develop a talent or learn something the normal way, but simply jumped right in and demonstrated proficiency. We know such people exist, but we can’t explain it.

A little closer to home, you may have heard of something called “intuition” – the ability to arrive at a conclusion when there is insufficient knowledge for certainty. It’s one step above guessing, simply because it works more than mere random chance would predict. When intuition actually does work, it allows by-passing a fully conscious counting of all factors, leaping over some logical steps but with equally valid results.

Not everything less than conscious is merely emotional. There is a form of intelligence, if you will, which operates in the subconscious. Mysticism claims to tap into this. The difficulty we run into is most folks who claim to use it seem to end up pretty much where emotions might take them, and we are rightly skeptical. We assert the Bible shows the real thing, but that doesn’t necessarily make it easy.

Biblical Anthropology

There is some ground of assumption we have to cover to before we can claim the biblical spiritual heritage of Christian Mysticism. First, we have to understand biblical anthropology. What makes us human as the Bible views things?

Of all creatures, we are uniquely able to commune with God personally. In the Beginning, that’s what we did. Several places in the New Testament are references to human nature as three parts. The flesh is obvious, and the soul is familiar. Within the soul, we find functional subdivisions: mind-intellect, emotions-appetites, and the will. It’s not hard to figure out our emotions are mental signals of appetites, closely linked to the flesh. No great reasoning capacity there, but if you let emotions rule, you are typically viewed as childish, at best. The intellect regards itself as the traffic control system, can be highly developed and gain some measure of ascendancy over the emotions. However, it relies on the will to actually do anything. What we do not seem to understand in modern Western Christianity is there exists also a third faculty called the spirit, separate from the soul. The power of the intellect is not what makes us superior to animals, but the spirit, which can commune with God.

What differentiates the Lost from the Redeemed? The former are dead in spirit; the latter are alive. God has come to them and breathed life into their dead spirits, which is where the Holy Spirit unites with us. If Jesus lives in you, He lives in your spirit, born from Above. Lost people still have souls, or Hell would have no meaning. But they have no spirits.

The spirit, for purposes of academic discussion, does not reside in the mind, but shows itself in the subconscious. Our problem is the emotions tend to hide there, too. Our intellect can't tell the difference, at least initially. But it should be obvious at this point the mind must learn to subject itself to the Spirit-spirit union, or you will be walking in the flesh, operating as if you weren't spiritually born.

Convictions

You may have heard the old saw: *Opinions you hold; convictions hold you*. Opinions are the result of intellectual exercise, and remain within that province. Convictions come from God, planted in your being as the demands He makes on you. They are your character. The first step to taming the mind and empowering the spirit is to examine your convictions. Until you are conscious of what drives you, of those things you simply cannot walk away from, you will find yourself too often surrendering to things which make you feel guilty, and may never know why. Knowing your convictions will go a long way to preventing neurosis.

This is not the same as religious beliefs. Doctrine and theology tend to be exercises of intellect alone. Convictions are those choices you are forced to make within a given context. Once you understand them, it helps to inform your theology, giving it life. For example, I have the conviction torture is wrong in any degree under all circumstances, and nothing in this world can change that. My theology is forced to build on that. It won't matter what you raise up against that conviction; it will stand through and beyond my very life. I am unable to change it, but it makes demands on me I dare not ignore, or I cannot stand in God's presence.

Convictions are the core of your spiritual nature. It's not as if Lost folks can't have them, but it's not the same. For we who are called into eternal life, convictions are the anchor for everything which follows. Nor would I say they do not change, but that nothing in this world can change them, including you. Rather, your first step toward Christian maturity is knowing them as clearly as you can. God put them there, and everything He demands of you personally starts there. You gain your first major step to Christian Mysticism by instituting the mental habit of feeling for them frequently, until they become familiar and predictable.

When you can then cause your will to seize upon them, and overrule all other considerations – particularly mere logic – then you have made the first solid link between the Spirit and your conscious mind. God will never demand of you anything contrary to the convictions He planted in you. If you make a firm commitment of your will to keep a tight grip on your convictions, we call that **faith** – a highly abused term which means loyalty, commitment, and trust in God. The Spirit does not speak directly to the intellect, but to the will, which the Bible calls your “heart.” While convictions tend to stir emotions, the heart is not associated in Scripture with feelings, but with decision and commitment.

The Other World

When Jesus walked on the earth, He seldom gave much attention to the expectations of this world. Instead, He kept talking about the Kingdom of the Sky – that's a more literal rendering of the words. It was obviously not a literal term, but a figure of speech depicting the Realm of the Spirit, ruled by His Father in Heaven (“the Sky”).

Indeed, by human or worldly standards, He failed utterly. Not only was He executed, but went along with it voluntarily. There's nothing rational about that. Rather, it was altogether *other-worldly*. Indeed, another popular old saw among preachers: “So heavenly minded he was no earthly good.” That's supposed to be somewhat of an insult, but I assure you Jesus was just that. This world had no use for Him, and today prefers a mythical version, denying the real thing.

Jesus said He was the ultimate living and breathing revelation of God. Take a hint, folks: *The Ultimate Truth of all things is a Person*. Truth does not exist of itself; there is no objective body of ideas or something out there separate from God's Person. Either it reflects God or it's a lie, so all truth is God's Truth. But we cannot possibly know it in the mind, except as we come to know Jesus the

Person. As long as He remains in your mind a mysterious figure detached from your reality, you don't know Him. This is all gibberish, unless you realize the objective is to renew the mind, to train the intellect to follow the Spirit.

The original sin in the Garden, eating from the Tree of Knowledge, meant placing the human intellect on the throne. If your brain can figure it out, then it's not Truth, and it's not of faith. The brain has only one part to play in the Kingdom, and that is working out how best to execute what the will has already committed to, not deciding whether any of those choices are a good idea. The choices were made in the Spirit-spirit and the will is locked on that; now figure out how to execute.

Whatever really matters before God is already worked out in Heaven. Your mission is to conform yourself to that commitment. Some of it will appear to make sense, but fundamentally none of it will. You aren't expected to understand, but to serve.

Three Pillars

That service must take a shape well described in Scripture. We will use for this discussion three markers in the character of the Christian Mystical living. There is nothing sacred about these three; they are simply used as the frame of reference for the intellect. We need to build a lifestyle which reflects the glory of God, and people need to see in our behavior a pattern of joy, transparency, patience and other traits which can be fully manifested only by the grace of God.

Commitment to Truth – God is Truth, and at any and all cost to ourselves, we will not compromise on what He demands of us. Truth is obviously bigger than us, and that Truth says we are nothing. More, it says we are broken and untrustworthy. You must trust God; you cannot ever trust yourself. You cannot trust your intellect to discern what matters most, nor even successfully frame our obedience. We will fail, and this we take for granted. What matters is not the performance, but the commitment. God accepts a holy desire as holiness itself.

All things you can name or touch within your control are merely tools. Nothing in this world, including your very life, is sacred. Property, skills, talents, ideas, dreams, hopes, relationships – it's all just stuff, all disposable, all entrusted to us as stewardship from God. We will discard anything and everything at His behest. That's because we know we can't trust anything to get us into Heaven.

While honesty is a necessity, this does not mean we simply babble to anyone at every moment everything which crosses our minds. People don't need to know everything, only the Truth which applies to that particular moment. What is God's message of revelation through you to that other person? We hide nothing, but we remain aware the human minds of others can only process just so much at a time. Give them what God wants you to give them. Withhold what He does not direct you to give, but be ready to offer it.

Empathy – God cares about His Creation. He sent His own Son to live among us, to suffer our pains, and to die horrifically and innocently to purchase our redemption. All you have to do is signal to the world that redemption is available. Nothing you say or do can persuade them to accept it; God alone can do that. It's all 100% miracle. He chooses to use us for the mission of manifesting that grace, allows us to go along for the ride while He does His mighty work in human souls and spirits.

There is nothing we can do which matters. Yet we know people can observe our doings and detect something underneath. We all know how to fall in love, so simply extrapolate to every living being you encounter and decide as an act of will you will care, you will exert yourself sacrificially on God's behalf. Nothing is asking too much, unless it conflicts with conviction. You can't make them accept or understand that sort of love nailed to the Cross, but whatever it demands, you press forward with it until God says, "stop."

Disentangled – You serve at God's command, and nothing in this calls for you to measure results. Your human mind can't resist measuring results, and calculating actions to gain certain ends, but the spirit does not operate that way. The results are not in your hands, but God's. Even in your self, results are God's gift of grace, not measured out according to effort, but on His own divine measure. So if people to whom you feel called to reach out don't respond, or don't respond as you expect, it has

no bearing on your calling to keep giving. You aren't purchasing results, since that was done on the Cross long ago. You are remaining on duty at whatever cost Heaven wants to expend from God's vast treasure house.

You can afford to absorb everything this world throws at you, since you are not your own. From the smallest task – sitting in traffic while drivers around you go mad with frustration – to the greatest of tasks, you can demonstrate the divine serenity of Heaven. Time is of no consequence, ultimately. You have nothing to hide, nothing to lose, nothing to save. You can't trust yourself, and you have no need to trust others. You let them act however they act, and only act to protect what God demands, without even expecting to succeed. There is no such thing as frustration, because you don't invest yourself in results. You act because God demands it, and there is no other reason.

Such a life will take you places where God pleases to use you. By no means will you ever lose consciousness of the logic of men in this world. Your corporate rat-race job, and your military oath, and your independent service contract, and your forced unemployment will demand it of you, but God rules at every point whether you perform as they expect. You let Him rule the consequences, and may not even bother to defend your actions verbally, since speaking your faith may be casting pearls before swine. God decides, and can in every moment tell you what to say or to say nothing. You are simply ready.

Decisions, Decisions

How do you decide the will of God? We've already established the necessity of living from your convictions. Thus, we start from the center. The first point of reference will always be what you must do to remain faithful to what God has planted in your soul.

If nothing in the moment violates your convictions, then your next concern is walking in the Spirit of Christ: transparency, love and peace. How can you demonstrate His presence in the moment? The intellect is not utterly useless in this task, but must obey, not rule. We take the Laws of God as a reflection of His will on earth, but the Laws are lifeless until the Spirit breathes through them.

If nothing obvious calls out to you in that commitment, then do what brings you peace. If you pray at all times to be directed to the place where you have peace before the Lord, it creates a habit of mind which refines your choices because it refines your character. So it may be a very creative and artistic impulse or something utterly pedestrian, but you are free in Christ to be what He makes of you.

At the very outer reaches of the most inconsequential things you face in life, there is no sin in responding to your appetites. While the Fall has badly damaged our ability to interpret those signals, so that we often struggle to discern what God provided as the proper means to satisfy our appetites, they are in themselves not particularly sinful.

Get Me Out of Here

Nothing in this world is eternal. It's all fallen and utterly in need of redemption. You don't take yourself seriously, nor anything you can see, touch or name. Your greatest longing has nothing to do with this life except to get out of it. Our entire existence is one long plea for escape into the arms of God. Suffering and sorrow are the norm here, but He decides when the mission is done. So we act in hope of His final reward, which is leaving this world.

Preserve what God has granted you as stewardship, but by no means according to the rules of logic, by the measures of this world. Our bodies are a paradox: We are His Temple, but temples are merely symbolic of devotion to Him. They are reserved, set aside for His sole use, but He can surely decide to burn it down at His whim. You would tend to take care of your body, but not at the expense of His calling, because the body is not the calling.

So it is with blood kin, including children. You would fight to keep them out of evil hands, even fight to the shedding of blood, but only if God said so. You can trust them to Him when His duties take you away from them. There is no higher loyalty you can offer to anyone on this earth than your utterly unconditional loyalty to God. Love them, but don't cling to them too tightly, or you won't be

ready to leave. He is your true family, your One True Love. You can't wait to be with Him face to face, so don't set your heart on anything in this world.