

# Faith and Works II

*The Contemporary and Biblical Contexts*

Col. 2:8

# Living and Walking in the Spirit

Surely a sign of the times is how many ministries there are sending out letters to Christians hoping to get a fee for anointed or special teachings (2 Thess. 2:2). The mentality is that after one is saved, there is a journey to begin to grow closer to God, how to become more spiritual, and how to get blessings. And so the focus is on those things one needs to do to advance closer to God or personal perfection, rather than seeking first the Kingdom of God through membership in the body of Christ.

Gal. 3:3 Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?

Those of us who meet the Biblical criteria for a Christian (Acts 8:37; Luke 23:43; Rom. 10:8-10), began by believing in our hearts and confessing with our mouths the message of the Gospel, and a prerequisite of receiving God's grace is being in a state of awareness of our need for Christ due to our own inherited fallen condition (Rom. 3:10-20; Rom. 5:12-20).

John 3:5-8 Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit."

But those who are always learning the latest new teaching, and never, by design, able to come to the knowledge of the truth (2 Tim. 3:7), just as truth is in Jesus and He Himself is usually a minor ingredient if He is present at all (Eph. 4:21), those who follow in these teachings follow them because the rational, natural/carnal mind assumes we need to do something to get somewhere, and there are people

who know how to target and market that need. While in that mindset, we are still looking at the outward earthen vessel, still debtor to the flesh, and instead of seeking our higher life in Christ, we are focused on trying to raise our lower one.

And all too often, those who are seeking a captive audience, those who creep into households through modern media and make captives of gullible individuals loaded down with sins (2 Tim. 3:6) will first create awareness of the need by drawing attention to the earthen vessel, and create an environment where those taught are lead to compare themselves to the salesman who will claim to have found an answer highlighted by personal testimonies of success in the things the gentiles seek. They appear quite spiritual, at least in front of the camera, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves (Matt. 7:15), some amassing personal fortunes that yearly exceed 100s of millions. Obviously there is a need out there.

And the difference between today's modern preaching and that of Biblical Christianity is very simple, and even a child could understand it. The modern ministries are marketing themselves with their manipulation of God's message, where as a true Biblical teacher preaches Christ, and not as an example of how to achieve success in life, but Christ as the answer Himself, the way, truth and life.

2 Cor. 4:5-7 For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bond servants for Jesus' sake. For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us.

We think in our carnal mind that walking in the spirit is a way to get closer to God by making ourselves by our actions more acceptable to Him, where as the scripture says we must first live by the spirit (be born again, leaving that which we once trusted in behind, not looking back), then walk in the new life (Gal. 2:20; Gal. 5:25).

A child can grasp, and understand the simplicity and purity of the Gospel (2 Cor. 11:3), and indeed, we are all to be children in how we must receive it, as the spirit would bear witness that we are His children, joint heirs, members of his household, no longer slaves. (Heb 8:11) . But there is little money to be made selling that information, especially as the audience will turn their attention to Christ and no longer remain a captive audience. In fact against true faith, not in miracles, but in Him who give the authority for miracles, even the gates of Hades shall not prevail (Matt. 16:18).

Jesus said if the Son makes you free you shall be free indeed. But those who are trying to draw people to themselves need a captive audience, people who need what they are marketing, and so a prerequisite to a successful ministry is to propagate an incomplete gospel that leaves out the life of the believer in Christ, leaves out the death of the old nature on the cross of Christ, and instead puts people back at the starting line where they are told they need to learn what to do that they may do the works of God (John 6:28). This, by the way, is what Paul was referring to when he spoke of those "striking" believers in the face (2 Cor. 11:20).

Gal. 2:19-20 I through the law died to the law that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

"The life which I now live in the flesh", Paul wrote, "I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Gal. 2:20). "If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit" (Gal. 5:25). But other foundations are laid when they become the principle focus of the believer rather their life in Christ, when they are taught to fix their eyes on their own short comings or circumstances in order to sell them the remedy, rather than leading the sheep to the good pasture, and having them fix their eyes on Jesus (Heb. 12:2).

It is popular today to say that the devil is out to steal, kill and destroy all our prosperity. But in fact, Jesus said that it would be false shepherds that would be doing this as they come only to serve themselves (John 10:1-10; Acts 20:29-30).

Jesus is the water that quenches all thirst, His blood cleanses from Sin, His life the bread that eternally satisfies. It is on Him our minds and hearts are to be fixed (Col. 3:1), not watching our own feet to see if we can get them to carry our old nature over a distant finish line set by someone pointing to their own circumstances as a standard for the rest to follow. This is the definition of carnality, both for those leading, and those being lead.

People who are walking in the flesh are people who have never come to an end of trust in their own ability to improve their righteousness (Gal. 2:19). People who are in the spirit of life in Christ Jesus have by faith reckoned that their old nature was crucified with Him (Col. 2:11-12) and that now, by faith they are raised in Him, born again, the marriage to the old husband legally annulled by death, that they may be married to another, Christ (Luke 16:18; Rom. 7:1-6).

The mind set on the spirit is life, the mind set on the flesh is death (Rom. 8:6), as to be carnally minded puts one into the system of self improvement, trying to measure ourselves by ourselves, always a debtor to the flesh as it is still the foundation that our soul seeks to rest upon. And of course, the flesh is looking for the loaves and fishes, not the Bread of Life (John 6:35).

When we are walking in the works that God prepared for us, they are already there for us to walk in. We are then living the life God intended for us, not earning it.

Eph. 2:1-10 And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and

of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

Salvation is not something we work towards, it is something we are to work out.

Phil. 2:12-13 Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.

What is the work we are to do?

John 6:28-29 Then they said to Him, "What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?" Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent."

The problem is, our carnal mind, still processing on the bases of the fall, often receives a partial revelation of the Gospel, but then proceeds according to the old patterns, mistaking Jesus as a patch on the old garment, rather than a new wineskin (Mark 2:22, John 3:16).

The startling truth is, the new covenant is not like the old. Intellectually we might agree with that based just on the testimony of scripture:

Jer. 31:31-34 "Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah— not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."

Heb. 8:7-13 For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second. Because finding fault with them, He says: "Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah— not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they did not continue in My covenant, and I disregarded them, says the LORD. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. None of them shall teach his neighbor, and none his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more." In that He says, "A new covenant, " He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.

What was the condition implicit in the covenant God made with Israel when God was leading them out of Egypt? Do this and you will live. What is the condition implicit in the new covenant? Live, and you will do this.

Gal. 5:25 If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.

Colossians 2:6 As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him

But we naturally approach faith with a religious mind set. What must I do to do the works of God? The old and new covenants are based on completely different foundations. There is a difference between the covenant God made with the house of Israel when they were coming out of Egypt, and the new covenant, in Christ's death and resurrection, which says live by believing in Christ, and cease to believe and rely on the old foundation of the nature we inherited by natural birth from Adam, and only then in the new birth will we be able to do all things through Christ Jesus.

One covenant says do this and you will live, the other says, live, and you will be able to do this. The living comes first, and must be our focus, that is Christ Himself, not our religious agenda. We are to leave off the business of trying to make ourselves and repair, improve or transform our old nature and instead leave it behind us along with all other supports, all reliance on the opinions of the world about what we should look like, how we should act, leaving all that, and standing with Christ as the foundation, that is the goal Paul spoke of when describing his life in Christ.

Phil. 3:12-14 Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching

forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

The old nature seeks to improve itself until it is acceptable to God, trusting not in God's grace, but in obligating God on the bases of what he owes us for our actions, so we completely control the negotiation, we don't have to come and reveal our need for Him, don't have to have our sins revealed in the light. Instead we often seek the means, as per the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, to know as God until it can live without dependence on Him. But the new covenant for those who are truly born again into a living faith in Christ, is about working out our salvation, rather than working towards it.

Gal. 5:16-26 I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

We keep hearing about "lives changed" but all too often what is being referred to is behaviour modification, not actions resulting from a life based on a new foundation of life in Christ.

If we are not showing the love and forgiveness that God showed us, that is the result of a hard heart, poor soil for the seed of the Gospel, one not realizing the extent of the debt we all owe, one who does not realize their own need (Luke 7:47), nor the Love of God shown when He gave His only Son (Rom. 8:32), nor the surpassing value of what we are offered in Christ, the chance to be clothed with Him instead of our own filthy rags.

If we are not showing the evidence of salvation and faith in the Jesus of the Gospel there is not a need for more works for the flesh to do to try and make itself behave more forgiving or loving to earn or improve its relationship with God, instead, one goes to the wedding and wears the wedding garment provided, clothed with Christ, and for joy of the riches of His inheritance in the saints, receiving the good news of the Gospel in a good heart, for joy in the revelation of Christ we gladly cast all that we have here behind us for the privilege of becoming members of his kingdom, even to being born as members and joint heirs with Christ, and join in the work of building up the saints, His body, the dwelling place of His spirit, the church (Eph. 4:16).

James speaks of the works that accompany faith, but he is not saying do these things and you will have faith, he is saying if you have faith you will show it by how you treat those around you. They will know you are my disciples, Jesus said, by your love for one another, not you will become my disciples if you act loving (John 13:35; 1 John 4:19).

In Acts 2, they held all things in comon, had unity of the spirit in the bond of peace, but it was threatened by those who sought to simply add the Gospel to themselves for their own gain, rather than coming into the body as member complete in Christ.

The incident of Ananias and his wife Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11) are a warning about the yeast of the Pharisees, about being double minded, not clothed in Christ, but

doing things to be measured by the external, which in turn leads to coveting the things that the flesh trusts in. No axe was laid to the root of the tree.

Those in Christ are created for good works, not created by them, and those works are to make disciples, those mature and secure on the foundation of Christ, built up in Him, with Christ as the head, aided by the gifts of the holy spirit distributed as he wills for the work of the gospel,

Eph. 4:7-16 But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore He says: "When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, And gave gifts to men." (Now this, "He ascended"—what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.) And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ— from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

That is where our joy is to come from by the way, not that miracles are done here in support of the work of the gospel.

The problem is when we are carnal, we seek the gifts for our own advancement in the kingdom of men (Acts 8:20-23).

Luke 10:20 "Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven."

And if they are done instead to bring attention to a ministry or individual rather than Christ they should not draw our focus away from Christ. Miracles do not legitimise a teaching or ministry. Our eyes are to remain fixed on Him (Heb. 12:2; Luke 9:62).

Mark 13:21 For false Christs and false prophets will rise and show signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.

In all the modern confusion scattering those who were seeking truth Paul would still say, as he did to the Galatians:

Gal. 4:19 My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you...

So what are we choosing to listen to in regards to Christian teaching, and why?

1 Cor. 1:23-24 But we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.