

# Faith and Works VIII

*The Contemporary and Biblical Contexts*

Col. 2:8

## Game Changer

I remember when I was out of work for over two years, just picking up one day jobs here and there. To my natural mind, my situation was very bad indeed. In my field things can change enough in a couple of years time that unless one is actively involved in the industry, ones skills will quickly become obsolete. And I remember walking through the woods near my house, talking rather energetically to God, complaining that I was feeling frustrated. But then I said, some remote scripture coming through in my self pity, that I knew God would have the last say, that He would be proven right and I, in my unbelief, wrong.

And of course He was, and He did more than I was asking or thinking. I was thinking in terms of the game I knew. And a few years later, after events that I could not on my own have influenced or caused to come about, I had gone from the equivalent of playing checkers, to playing chess. God had changed the game, not just let me win the one I thought I was playing.

We need by faith to let God, by His word, lead us to the rock that is higher than ourselves, seeing ourselves seated with Christ, a joint heir with Him by God's grace, where He is far above all principalities and powers that rule the normal lot of those without hope in this life. Many times scripture changes the game, puts things on an entirely different level than where we start out when looking from our own perspective.

Not a few wise and learned men in the things of religion came to Jesus and sought to engage Him in public debate. As the crowd watched, Jesus usually did not beat them at their own game. Instead, He demonstrated they were playing the wrong game and then He pointed them to the right one.

Here is an example:

Matt:22:15-22 Then the Pharisees went and plotted how they might entangle Him in His talk. And they sent to Him their disciples with the

Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that You are true, and teach the way of God in truth; nor do You care about anyone, for You do not regard the person of men. Tell us, therefore, what do You think? Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?" But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, "Why do you test Me, you hypocrites? Show Me the tax money." So they brought Him a denarius. And He said to them, "Whose image and inscription is this?" They said to Him, "Caesar's." And He said to them, "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." When they had heard these words, they marveled, and left Him and went their way.

The Pharisees came to win a particular game with Jesus, but instead, He changed the game, and in so doing, had already shown that the Pharisees did not know the rules.

Here is another example:

The rich young ruler came running up to Jesus and asked what last thing he needed to be doing to be sure of eternal life. His game was all about his own success at working the works of God. But Jesus tells us that the real work of God is to believe on Him whom God has sent. And real faith is when we not only say we believe Christ is the way, truth and life, but when we by faith live with Him as our foundation for who we are and the access we need to the Father, rather than trusting in our own way, the propositional truth of our natural understanding, and the ability of our own natural life to have the capability to achieve by its own actions eternal life.

Pilot asked Jesus what is truth? He was cynical because in his world of politics and power words in themselves could never have any relevant or persuasive meaning. Yet the issue was not about words. It was about Jesus who said I am The Way, The Truth and The Life, no one comes to the Father but by Me. Truth is in Jesus. We already have faith in something in the place where we need to put our faith in

Christ, and that would be ourselves. Pilot knew of no truth outside of the experience of his control of his existence through his political cunning and the force of the soldiers at his command. His need for truth only extended to his ability to dominate those under his authority. Of what practical value was anything beyond that? Yet Jesus taught that he who would be greatest, must become your servant.

When we are conscious of God's Holiness, or our fallen nature, and of Christ's payment for our sin and of God's offer of new life in His Son, we are in possession of real truth concerning the final nature of things, and that is revelation that all things needed for our completeness are summed up in Christ, for in Him the fullness of deity dwells in bodily form, and God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, and it is our choice to put our faith in that revelation of Christ.

Christ isn't one of many viable philosophies for those seeking personal truth, He is the Son of God, and it is through Him by faith we have access to the Father, not an idea derived from Him or a teaching about Him or an imitation of something He did. How Jesus seems to do things in the Gospels is incidental. Whatever He is doing is to show Who He is. These things I write that you may know and believe that Jesus is the Christ, said the apostle John in his gospel, not so you can discover the secrets to act or operate like Him. If you believe in Him, turn your faith and foundation from yourself to Him, the signs will follow.

Focusing on the signs gets one about as far as it did Simon the magician who tried to buy from the apostles the ability to bestow the Holy Spirit by the laying on of hands. And how much of our Christian industry today spends all its time buying or selling self improvement techniques? If you do not Abide in Me, Jesus said in John chapter 15, you can do nothing. You search the scriptures because in them you think you find how to get or control your life and its circumstances, yet it is they, the scriptures that testify of Me, but you are unwilling to come to Me.

Too often we are reading into the Bible rather than reading the Bible. We should not be looking for individual scriptures that we can predefine by a teaching we have heard, but being able to follow the revelation of Christ from the beginning to the end. The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of true prophecy.

Another game changer is the story where Jesus draws on the ground, then asks the accusers of a woman whom they caught in adultery to cast the first stone if they are without sin. What system do we want to be in? If we live by the law, we will have to be perfect, and as we are all descended from Adam in a fallen world (Rom. 5), that is not only not possible, but through the law comes the knowledge of sin. The sting of death is sin, the power of sin is the law. The law brings about wrath. If we were reading God's word with an open heart, our need for His gift of salvation in Christ would be most welcome, and more valuable than all we possess in this temporal life.

Do we want to operate under grace or law? Judgment will be without mercy to those who show no mercy. What we loose here will be loosed in heaven, forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Self righteousness makes us trust in the law. Those with a heart for God and His righteousness have come to realize sin is not an external thing, and to get at it the Axe will need to be at the root of the tree, that out of the heart, not from things coming in, are where the symptoms of sin arise, and when we are honest, not hiding in the dark, but standing under the light of God's standard of righteousness, we realize that all have sinned and come short of the Glory of God, that by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.

Another game changer, is that we must be born again, not remade, remodeled or refurbished or even rejuvenated. No, the old man is to be cast aside, the new one, Christ Himself, is the life we are by faith to put on. For I have died, Paul wrote in Galatians, and my life is hid with Christ in God, and the life I live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and delivered Himself up for me, that I might be the righteousness of God in Christ.

There are those who try to conceptualize the kingdom of God and the Authority of Christ, and authority in the church along the lines of the rulers in this world who lord their authority over others, and place themselves accountable only to themselves as they determine what the will of God is. Those who teach such are usually also confident that they are anointed based on things they have done or experienced, to stand between those under them and God. Thus to be humble, spiritual, and in submission to those in authority are the actions we need to perform to progress in the kingdom of God. Humility done for the sake of being humble as a work is vain and really just pride.

Paul speaking to the Corinthians, said he wished that, as they thought of themselves, that they really were kings (in the earthly sense), because then we could reign with you, but God seems to have made Apostles the least, to this day we are hungry, persecuted, being poor, yet making many rich. There are those who would teach that Godliness is a means of great gain, who peddle their teachings for monetary wealth, but Paul refused to be classified with such.

Is this the worlds way? If Christ is not raised, our faith is in vain, of all people we are the most to be pitied Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 15. Let us eat drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die. But hope that is seen, is not hope, for we through the spirit, by faith, have fixed our hope completely on the grace to be revealed at His coming, and all who have this hope fixed on Him, purify themselves just as He is pure. Is the game we are playing about what we can possess on Earth, or the treasures we can store in Heaven?

So when the argument comes over which teacher or denomination has the best theology or grasp of spiritual concepts, that is playing the wrong game. The game is Christ, being complete in Him, clothed in Him, letting all go that we may be satisfied with Him as our treasure.

And the ultimate game change. He who seeks his lower life, will lose it. He who seeks his higher, will find it. If anyone seeks to be My disciple, Jesus said, let him

or her pick up their cross, and follow me. And how is the game of dying to self to be played? Not harsh treatment of the body, nor a matter of external removing of dirt from the flesh. But an appeal to God for a clean conscience, through faith in the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. The kingdom of God is not a matter of food and drink, but righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit by whom we are sealed when we believed, and who confirms our adoption crying within our hearts, "Abba, Father".

This is the ultimate difference between the worlds approach to God, and the provision God has given us in His Son. We are still moving on the momentum of our seeking the tree of knowledge to supply us with the wisdom to become as God, rather than trust Him to keep us in relationship with Him connected and sustained by His life.

We are to work out our salvation in awe and Reverence. Not work to move from where we are to a future point closer to God. Work out, from the position of rest within where we are in Him, complete in Him, fulfilled with the riches and the glory of our inheritance in Christ.

This was the problem of the second son in the story of the prodigal son. He did not realize he already had it, he was still looking for recognition based on what he was doing, even though he was the son. The prodigal son returned, and realized the fathers love based on the forgiveness and grace he received after he had come to know for himself his own unworthiness for his fathers love.

Yet the other son was banking on his relationship with his father, and looking for a control, a determined reciprocal amount due him based on his efforts at doing everything he was supposed to do. He trusted that his works obligated his father. But his brother had come to the end of himself, and in the light, had acknowledged his sinfulness, and come to his father looking only for mercy and grace.

Too many ministries today are offering self improvement advice, and the presupposition is that you are still at point A according to your measurement of outward circumstances by those around you, then you need to do something to get to point B. And we say we are forgiven if we confess our sins, but then we start offering advice on how to improve the first husband.

And thinking according to the rules of the game played by the world that he who dies with the most toys wins, we suppose that if God is love, He would want the best for His children, and that those who demonstrate prosperity, wealth and health are obviously good advertising for God, and that is the best way to attract the gentiles to Gods ways of doing things, as they seek these things anyway. And that is trying to use God to help us win the game everyone has been playing since the fall when we believed we would not die apart from God because we could learn what He knows and operate like Him.

Too many messages are full of good truth, but when all the teaching is lined up and the points connected, the direction of the listener is toward doing something to get to Christ or win God's favor. They are often confident that they are at the ninety percent mark, and now seek the teacher for that last thing they need to do, some routine, some attitude adjustment, some work of charity, perhaps a self serving submission to religious authority.

These are the ones who are rich in their own eyes, which God says are blind, and in need of nothing, who do not understand the need for gold refined by fire. And when we are comparing ourselves by each other and playing the game of seeking to be above those around us, or failing that, trying lower those around us, often by gossip or criticism, this is the root of the legalism, the mind set on the flesh.

What is needed is good soil for the gospel, a heart able to know the depth of His Love and our need for His grace. But to do that we have to come to the end of the game we were born playing and know we have lost. When we do that, and turn to a

relationship to God in Christ, then all the games are over, for we are complete in Him.