

Faith and Works XI

The Contemporary and Biblical Contexts

Col. 2:8

Who He Is

Its usually not offensive to people if Jesus is presented as God, and ourselves Gods or becoming Gods.

Its usually not offensive to people if Jesus is presented as someone who learned to become a God, and that we can learn to do that too.

But it is usually very offensive if Jesus is presented as God, and we are not.

Matthew 24:10 And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another.

Mark 6:3 Is this not the carpenter, the Son of Mary, and brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon? And are not His sisters here with us? " So they were offended at Him.

Luke 7:23 "And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me."

Who we say He is will reflect on what we are willing to admit of our own condition. Following the real Jesus involves a cross. Not a gauntlet of pain or hard labour that we can achieve and take credit for, that will obligate God to doing our will. And until we recognize that we need to replace our filthy rags and be clothed with Him, complete in Him, not trusting in ourselves, but taking the hope we had of achieving our own righteousness and putting it all on the foundation of Him, until we do that we will not produce lasting fruit.

This tension is well seen in John 8. Jesus has just shamed the Pharisees who came demanding a women be stoned to death for being caught in the very act of adultery. God considers our love of anything that puts Him second as adultery. Jesus showed that they did not understand the fundamentals of sin, that it is not individual actions, but the very nature of fallen man that renders all guilty before the judgement seat of God.

All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God and are need of salvation. By getting the accusers to look with honesty within, none could claim to be without sin. It was not because they were not very religious, and living a very strict religious life according to all that they knew from the scriptures and their traditions. It is because their Holiness depended on their religious rules and traditions, they could not come to God without it. As we shall see, needing to base our relationship with God on our works presupposes that we cannot abide in his presence in our natural unmodified state.

Ezekiel 20:11 And I gave them My statutes and showed them My judgments, 'which, if a man does, he shall live by them.'

So there is a moment of self reflection, of humility, and the girl is not stoned, for when we can no longer hide in the darkness and are exposed by the light of God's truth, we realize that our own righteousness, though outwardly attractive to those around us, is to the Holiness of God as filthy rags. For many using the natural mind, this would be the end of the teachable moment, and we would concluded that we should judge not lest we be judged.

But what we are really doing at that point is lowering the expectations of the law in order to accommodate our less than perfect efforts. This would keep us in the game, with an easier set of rules to follow. That was not the purpose of the law, and not one jot or tittle, Jesus said, shall perish from the Law of God until all is fulfilled. Sin is still an issue. What should no longer be an issue is our trying to merit God's favour and once again be connected to His eternal life on the bases of our works.

Rom. 3:20 Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

Rom. 3:23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

If we just stop at the place where we make accommodations for the flesh, we are only getting half the message. For not only did Jesus point out that the Pharisees were in themselves not perfect by the standards of the Law, He then goes on to offend the very fallen nature of man by exempting Himself from our fallen lineage from Adam. It's one thing to have a moment of humility, and point out to the religious leaders that even they need a moment of humility. It is another thing entirely to then say what Jesus says:

John 8:12 Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life."

John 8:23-24 And He said to them, "You are from beneath; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins. "

So now the issue goes back to one of the Pharisees seeking to justify themselves, to validate the level of piety they have achieved with their own religious works, and the demand by them that Jesus be measured by their own system of religious achievement. And Jesus does not allow Himself to be included there, He has a different issue and insists it become the center of consideration. And that is not an issue of law and works, but of nature, for Jesus is saying that before Abraham was even born, He existed, that He is the Son of God.

John 8:57-59 Then the Jews said to Him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?" Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM." Then they took up stones to throw at Him; but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by.

We need to emphasize something here that needs to be kept in the for-front of our consideration, and that is that it is not the act of a particular sin in itself that makes us a sinner, it is the fact that we are starting from our very birth in a state that is cut off from connection to the spiritual life of God. We are born on a different foundation. It was not the execution of a particular sin that makes man a sinner. The fact that the foundation of the Pharisees relationship to God was based on their works was proof that they would not have to do if they were already righteous.

1 Tim. 1:9 knowing this: that the law is not made for a righteous person, but for the lawless...

And because we are justifying ourselves by what we earn by our own works, and the approval of those around us of what we do or do not do, what we have or do not have, because we are evaluating truth from our own perspective, Jesus goes on to say that not only are we born in a fallen race, but because we are still working under the assumption that there is a teaching or work that we can do to justify ourselves or become as God to sustain ourselves with eternal life, that this is the continuation of the lie we believed in the garden, that we are perfectible by our own knowledge and works. And the truth is, the law came about to expose sin, not provide a way for a man to work to change what he is from birth.

John 8:44 You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it.

And it is this idolatry of ourselves that we either allow the law to smash, or continue in hypocrisy never coming to the end of ourselves, loving the one, hating the other. We will not be able to love God with our whole heart, if our relationship with Him is based on following the Law.

Romans 4:15 because the law brings about wrath; for where there is no law there is no transgression.

Nor will we be able to avoid the carnal behaviour of unforgiveness that results from those who seek to justify themselves and measure themselves by themselves. Cain slew Abel because Abel's deeds were more righteous than Cains. The mind set on the flesh is death. Those with a carnal minset are by nature in competition with each other. And because we are operating in a merit system of reward for work, there is no forgiveness of debts, no mercy, for such acts undermine the value our actions earn for ourselves.

1 Corinthians 3:3 For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?

James 3:14-15 But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic.

Galatians 3:24 Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith.

God's truth is that unless we are born again, into the life of the perfect Son of God who gave Himself for the sins of the world, we cannot see the kingdom of God (John 3:16).

We have many different Christ's in our modern religious environment. Some see Him as a friend, some as a life coach, some as an example of enlightened spirituality, and some, certainly not the majority, see Jesus as the bread of life.

One of these views will be offensive to all who are living the lie of the Devil.

John 8:23 And He said to them, "You are from beneath; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. 24 Therefore I said

to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins."

John 6:51 I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world."

John 6:66 From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more.

This can be a hard word to minister, as there is always the tendency to try to avoid offence by giving the flesh credit for being perfectible so the ego of man can take pride in its own works, denying what God says about the complete fallen nature of man and creation.

Jesus said we must receive the Gospel as children. When we come in our pride and confidence in our own abilities, when we are really depending on our own ability to do the works of God rather than rest in faith on the completed work of God in Christ, the word of the cross is foolishness to the natural mind. The natural mind is seeking solutions, more knowledge from the tree to learn the secret of how to work its perfection and free itself from the perishing outward man (2 Cor. 4:16).

1 Cor. 1:17-18 For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect. For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

2 Kings 5:13 "If the prophet had told you to do something great, would you not have done it? How much more then, when he says to you, 'Wash, and be clean'?"

Rom. 10:9-13 If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be

saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame." For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. For "whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved."

2 Cor. 2:14-16 Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place. For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life.

John 8:31-32 "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

John 15:5 "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.

Matt. 16:15 He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"