

Faith and Works XIII

The Contemporary and Biblical Contexts

Col. 2:8

Fire

How to store treasures in heaven where rust, moth and thieves cannot destroy (Matt. 6:19-21)? How to produce the fruit that will last (John 15:16)? How to get the gold refined by fire (Rev. 3:18)?

The treasure the natural carnal man seeks is the approval we can win from each other by meeting superficial man made standards of appearance, behavior and willingness to subscribe to the groups belief system, yet never coming together in Christ, as the body of Christ complete in Him, and seeking the fellowship of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus.

It is usually measuring ourselves by ourselves that keeps our attention on the things that are seen, rather than the eternal unseen things, and what we are measuring is what we have built on the old foundation.

Jesus paid the cost for our heavenly dwelling place, the prerequisite is moving from the old foundation of sand to the new foundation of rock, which is Himself, not a revitalized repainted version of our old nature, but a process so completely new that the Bible describes it as being born again of the spirit.

When will we become Christ conscious rather than self conscious (Col. 3:1)?

Paul had come to the place where he knew he was strong in Christ when he, Paul, put no confidence in the flesh. He even had sought the Lord three times to remove an infirmity, a thorn in the flesh, yet learned that God's power is made perfect in conscious weakness.

Gal. 4:13-15 You know that because of physical infirmity I preached the gospel to you at the first. And my trial which was in my flesh you did not despise or reject, but you received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus. 15 What[c] then was the blessing you enjoyed? For I bear

you witness that, if possible, you would have plucked out your own eyes and given them to me.

2 Cor. 12: 8-9 Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

Was Paul lacking in faith for miracles? Not at all:

2 Cor. 12: 12 Truly the signs of an apostle were accomplished among you with all perseverance, in signs and wonders and mighty deeds.

But this was part of a different growth process, a faith with its anchor secure beyond the veil (Heb. 6:19).

2 Cor. 4:16-18 Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

This truly is the faith walk that seeks the kingdom of heaven before the things the gentiles seek (Matt. 6:33).

Only after Moses had spent 40 years in the desert did the burning bush show him that only that which remained and was not consumed was what God would use for His purpose. Many times there is a desert experience to separate us from the things that we mistakenly thought were our strengths, so that we could then put our complete faith and trust in Christ.

Exodus 3:2 And the Angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush. So he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, but the bush was not consumed.

As the bush was in the fire, so must we be in Christ.

His is a baptism of fire (Luke 3:16). Only that not built of wood, hay and stubble on the foundation of Christ will remain. The fire will test what we have built and on which foundation (1 Cor. 3:9-13).

Jesus used another analogy to this process when He spoke of Himself as the true vine:

John 15: 1-8 "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vine-dresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. "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. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.

Those who bear fruit receive more pruning, not less. What is being pruned? Those things not belonging to true growth from the vine. This is not always a matter of severe treatment of the body, for in itself that is of no value against the flesh and its lusts (Col. 2:23; Romans 13:14), and what it lusts for and always seeks, is to be the center of attention, to keep us debtors to its needs and wants.

To truly grow into the full stature of Christ, to take every thought captive so that all things are summed up in Christ, is to be conscious of that which is of supreme value, forgetting what is worthless and unprofitable. It is the spirit of life in Christ Jesus that sets the captives free, the flesh profits nothing. It is the word of Christ we must hear, receive, and walk in faith (Acts 10:36-43).

All that is not of Him and built on Him, will be burned by the fire. For our God is a consuming fire (Heb. 12:29; Mark 9:49).

1 Cor. 3:9 For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building. According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

The thief on the cross had nothing built on the foundation, but he was on the foundation, and that day, he was with the Lord in Paradise.

James 1:2-3 My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.

This kind of faith is not what one will hear if one has itching ears for the shortest highway to the things the gentiles seek. But when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on Earth (Luke 18:8)?

Jeremiah 22:21 I spoke to you in your prosperity, But you said, 'I will not hear.'

Hosea 13:6 When they had pasture, they were filled; They were filled and their heart was exalted; Therefore they forgot Me.

Matthew 24:37-39 But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.

2 Tim. 3: 1-5 But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power.

Rev. 3:14-22 "And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, 'These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God: "I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked— I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me. To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame

and sat down with My Father on His throne. "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."""

The greatest weapon the enemy will use against the true church of Christ in the last days will not be persecution, but the choking of the word by the weeds, the cares for the things of this world. Those who deny the power of the gospel are those who will profess Christ, but find their satisfaction and meaning based on the elementary things of this world, rather than being complete in Christ.

Martyrdom is the ultimate dying to self, as at that moment the choice between the seen and unseen is clear, there can be no double mindedness, no middle ground.

1 Peter 4:12 Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy. If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.

There is gold refined by fire - that can be persecution, but the more like the world we become, satisfied by the riches of this world, there will be no persecution, no offence of the cross, for the seed of the word of Christ (Acts. 10) will be choked by the things of this world, even though scripture teaches they are all destined to perish by fire.

Gold melts at 1,102 degrees C., and at that point the impurities separate and can be removed. The impurities are not refined with the gold, they become separated in the heat, and are finally removed. That which is flesh is flesh, that which is spirit is spirit. We must be born again, there is no improvement process for the old nature, and legally, until it is dead to us, we cannot be legally married to Christ, the bridegroom.

Rom. 7:4 Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another—to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God.

What are those things that the fire removes?

Matthew 13:22 Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful.

Farmers will sometimes set fire to a field that is overgrown with weeds to clear it.

Heb. 6:7-8 For the earth which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it, and bears herbs useful for those by whom it is cultivated, receives blessing from God; but if it bears thorns and briers, it is rejected and near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned.

The modern teaching of faith often seeks to put those fires out, to enable us to become rich and in need of nothing. Many churches today are not about the coming together of the body of Christ, but instead are merely satellites of a loose yet consistent confederation of televangelists and commercial religious enterprises that deliberately teach an incomplete gospel in order to create a dependency on their ministries offerings.

Those seeking revenue from a captive audience will present religious terms and practices that are based on the first foundation, and will keep the marriage to the first husband very much alive by focusing attention on the things that are seen and perishing. Those very things that the carnal soul seeks to rest in are the things that seek to replace Christ.

Where our treasure is, there will our heart be also. Until we come to the end of ourselves, we do not begin to grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ. We are

only complete in Christ, when we are in Him, not when we try to add some of His attributes to ourselves. He who has the Son is free indeed (John 8:36).

Those things we call purpose, those things we call goals, those things that motivate us into action, many times those are the things that choke the Word, and our goals and motivations are often not to press on toward the goal of being free to answer the upward call of God in Christ. We look back, and seek religion as a means of keeping and building on our old foundation, still seeking to improve and sustain the first husband.

Did we hear a good message at our last religious meeting? Did we get a new direction for our walk? What were we told we would need to pack for our journey? Any direction we go to get closer to God, rather than standing firm on the foundation of Christ, will take us further into ourselves and apart from the steadfastness of faith and rest in His finished work.

Often the modern message, though encouraging, sends us on with renewed hope to keep going around the same mountain, always learning yet never coming to a knowledge of the truth, the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ (2 Cor. 11:3), our eyes not focused on the things above (Col. 3:1), but on ourselves (Rom. 8:5-6; Gal. 6:8). Who keeps reminding us of what we should forget as God forgives and declares it has been nailed to the cross (Zech. 3:1)?

The accuser of the brethren would do so through those he could influence on behalf of their covetousness and need to draw the attention of people to themselves, because when we are convinced on the evidence of the external, comparing ourselves by ourselves, the things that are seen and perishing, than those who can persuade us that they have what we need to get above the perishing state of all that is seen will ultimately own us through our debt to the needs of our first husband (Rom. 8:12).

Luke 17:32-33 Remember Lot's wife. Whoever seeks to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it.

Phil. 3:13 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, 14 I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Luke 9:62 But Jesus said to him, "No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."

Are you looking at the things that are seen, or the things that are unseen?

2 Cor. 4:18 while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

Is our revelation of the glory of God in the face of Christ, or yet another promise that if we eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, we will not need to be reconciled to God or depend on Him, but instead we will seek to sustain ourselves as He does?

We lose faith in the things of this world and our carnal nature only when we see they cannot sustain us. In the storm, our anchor is only firm on the other side of the vial, when all on this side pales in comparison. It is then we seem foolish in the eyes of the world when we sell all that we have to purchase a field that to their natural eyes seems barren and empty, useless to meet the desires of the carnal mind.

We can seek a religious practice that helps us have more confidence in ourselves, or we can walk in a faith that is dependent on who He is.

When will we step outside of our boat? When we finally come to the realization that it is sinking? Or will we recognize through the eyes of faith, and the inner confirmation of the witness of the Holy Spirit within us that we are the righteousness of God when we are by faith clothed in Christ? We must cast off the filthy rags, freely receive and wear the wedding garments offered to those who were not drawn away by the temptations and distractions of this world from the glory of the wedding feast of the lamb.

The fire is not to kill us, but to free us. One like the Son of God met those in the fiery furnace of the king of Babylon, and in that fire their fetters were melted away.

Heb. 12:7-11 If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

Paul was not in prison in the jail in Phillipi, the jailer was, it was Paul that through the foolishness of preaching the Gospel set him free, and in it all, a light that the darkness of the jail could not hide, illuminated the heart of Paul and Silas so that even in chains, having been beaten for the sake of the Gospel, they sang hymns. Paul was not in chains when He stood before the pomp and ceremony of Festus and Bernice, they were the ones who were captives, unable to open the gates of Hades, and their fate was certain destruction at the end of mans short time.

2 Peter 3:10-13 But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

1 John 3:3 And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.