

# Faith and Works

*The Contemporary and Biblical Contexts*

Col. 2:8

## Introduction

As a young believer, I was eager to grow in my relationship with the Lord, and for a number of months had fasted one day a week and spent an hour each day in prayer, seeking greater spiritual gifts and the will of the Lord. One night I was impressed that the phone was going to ring, and I remember thinking, "Whatever you wish to do tonight Lord, I am willing". The phone rang as I stood waiting, and I was invited to a prayer meeting with some men who were going to really press in and see God move.

This was at church building I had never been to before. I arrived at the church that evening, and went with the men into the building through a door on the first floor. It was just evening, and as we walked through the lower level I happened to glance to my right as we passed a certain room.

What I saw surprised me. There were rows of chairs with blue velvet material lit by rows of spotlights in the ceiling. They faced the front of the room where there hung from the ceiling two huge stone tablets, obviously representing the tablets Moses wrote the Ten Commandments on.

I did not mention my surprise at seeing this to my companions, but even as a new believer I knew there was something out of keeping with faith in Christ, and worship of the law.

We continued upstairs into what was the church sanctuary and in a small circle, there were not many of us, began in earnest to pray with all our might for God to move in our midst that evening. This went on for some time, but I was now seeing things from a different perspective, due to what I had seen in the room below. It was impressed on my heart as we fervently prayed on and on with great intensity, that the Lord was showing me that we were not praying in faith, but were seeking to move Him by our efforts.

After a long night, with nothing happening, we ran out of steam and concluded the meeting. As we walked through the lower floor on the way to the exit, the building not being very large, I noticed that the room I had seen earlier was now dark, which I thought was odd as I was under the impression we were the only ones in the building at that time, so I did not understand why the lights were now off. I stopped and asked my friend if he would mind showing me the room I had noticed. He looked at me with a blank look, walked over to the door and switched on the lights.

The room was empty, with only a few folding chairs in the center. No velvet seats, no Ten Commandment stone tablets hanging from the ceiling. There was no other room on that floor that I could have mistaken this for, and when I explained to my friend what I was looking for, he said there was no such room or objects in the church, that I must have been seeing things.

It was a month or so later when talking to that same individual that I learned the church building had once been a Jewish synagogue before being purchased by the current Christian denomination. After many years that experience still remains in my memory, the room, the chairs and lighting, the tablets, I can still see them clearly in my mind.

That event took place over twenty years ago. Now then, onto the reason why I am writing this document. It is certainly not to cast dispersion on the Jewish faith. I do not believe that was the point of what I was being shown.

Misunderstanding God's work to redeem fallen mankind in His Son Jesus will equally lead to a misunderstanding of God's work in reinstating Jerusalem as the focal point of God's work in the history of mankind, and of God's establishment of His kingdom on Earth in the last days.

But though I have never forgotten that vision, after a number of years I did not often think about it as I went about the routine of being involved in the usual local church activity.

Many years later, a church I had been attending and serving in for a number of years had a guest speaker come in, and so we set up special parking, seating arrangements, etc; everybody was working hard to get ready, as it was a small church, and this was a nationally known and popular speaker.

The speaker came and led a series of meetings that were very well attended, with people coming from all over to hear him speak, most of them long time followers of this fellow's ministry.

I do not feel that his passion in life was merely to sell tables full of books, CDs and DVDs, for he clearly had great enthusiasm for expounding his views before an attentive audience.

However, the dynamics of the event were that this renowned speaker came, and flattered us at the beginning of his messages telling us that of all the places he had spoken, he very much was enjoying our special fellowship, and we in turn reciprocated the complement by doing all we could to deplete his product table of all the materials he was selling to support his ministry.

And then he packed up and left for his next meeting, and we began setting the building back in order for normal weekly use.

It was then a great spiritual and emotional emptiness came over me, deeper than anything I had ever felt before. At that point I just suddenly realized that nothing was any different, it was back to the same old routine. I began to ask myself, what did we just do, and why?

Essentially what it seems to come down to is that we all have this natural ingrained tendency to think that if we just attend every meeting, perhaps jump around

enough, sing and clap loud enough, confess, tithe, and fast enough, do enough good works and even speak in tongues for long periods, that because of our great effort, God is going to have no choice but to notice and reward us

There always seems to be a new teaching or prophecy that promises that with just a little more effort, perhaps at the next meeting, we can get there. It seems to be an endless cycle, and it is pretty much led by commercial interests with sophisticated marketing plans who seem to understand all too well how to motivate and influence their target audience.

I felt I needed to go back to square one. I just started reading the Bible, not really caring what it was going to say or what I would find. Instead of looking for answers to my own questions, I wanted to pick up on just what questions the Bible itself was answering. It was time for me to go back to the Bible and see what it had to say for itself.

I soon began to come about to a realization that very often, what passes for Bible teaching is pretty much just our own opinions and ideas supported by "proof texts", usually individual Scriptures used in the context of our own messages, rather than having the message in context of the Scriptures.

And so I believe I am coming to a realization of the significance of what I saw in that vision years ago. The yeast of the Pharisees does not always result in long robes and long prayers in the market place.

The following writings should probably be viewed more as sketches or notations of thoughts and observations that have come to me as I have continued to study the Bible trying not so much to interpret it, but to simply listen to what it is saying.

I confess, and it will surely be obvious to the reader, that I am not a trained theologian and I am most certainly not attempting to put together a comprehensive doctrine of theology. My intention is not to go, as Paul writes in one of his letters, beyond what is written.

For the most part, I have found that if Christ isn't the answer, it may very well be that I have been asking the wrong questions. Too often it seems that we who would concern ourselves with religious truths often preach about Christ, but we do not, as was the consistent practice of the early church, preach Christ Himself. Hopefully there will be some of the later in the writings that follow.

Lord, in the name of Your servant Jesus, please let the words that follow demonstrate not how to curse the darkness but rather to light a candle, please allow by your Spirit for the following words be spirit and truth, taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.