

# Faith and Works L

The Contemporary and Biblical Contexts

Col. 2:8

## Beating the Rock

We can and do talk about the moral mandate and authority that the revelation of God's law, nature and character in the Bible gives for the fair and equitable treatment of man by his fellow man. But too often the church proclaims an imbalanced message only of morals and prescribes law to men who by nature are never changed inwardly from that which all of fallen mankind inherits from the first Adam.

The church which no longer preaches Christ has forgotten why the law God gave to Moses included extensive requirements for the shedding of blood on the temple alter. The law would keep men in the conditional covenants of God, but would never be the way to achieve what God had unconditionally promised Abraham. The law, the Bible says, was to be our tutor to lead us to Christ as there would always in the complete application of it be the reminder that there was yet a final sacrifice needed for sin, and that all were in need of it. Jesus came not for the those who thought they were well, but rather for those who were sick, and who hungered and thirsted for God's righteousness. The Gospel is not just another religious means of making men act better. The Gospel is the only way God has provided of changing men so that they will not have to act.

For morality itself rests on a greater truth illuminated by the Bible concerning the spiritual conditions and resolutions that the Gospel offers to deal with the root of the problem of why even religion, when it only presents the law of God, has failed to produce the true inward condition in man that the Bible says God is seeking, that condition of spirit and truth, the mind set on the spirit of life in Christ Jesus, that is to naturally produce the fruit of love and forgiveness and true charity unmotivated by the individuals ulterior motives concerning their attempts to build their own self esteem based on the approval of their fellow man, and put God Himself into debt by their works and religious service.

Instead of correctly handling the message of the Gospel, planting good seed and tending the soil so that it will not choke the word, we all too often are instead beating the proverbial rock with the staff of our doctrinal authority, and insisting our real problem is that there are no religious people who can follow moral laws as the bases for their relationship with God.

And most of our energy in the modern church amongst those who insist they have not fallen away into the modern falling away, is spent arguing about which prescriptions of behavior or doctrine we should be following and agreeing to, rather than lifting Christ up and allowing the focus of our attention to be drawn to Christ Himself. He is the author, perfecter and finisher of our faith. Yet we often only give mental ascent to Christ being the only way, truth and life. Often He is not the foundation for who we really are after all the onion peels of the outward man are removed and our innermost condition is revealed.

Until our hope is in Christ and our anchor is beyond the veil of this life, until our treasures are truly in heaven, with us seated in Christ at the right hand of God, clothed in Him, rather than our earthly tent, there will always be in the organized church a preoccupation with discovering the latest ways that spirituality can be the bases for continued reliance and improving upon the foundation of the flesh, the old nature, the first husband, who we were born as descendents of the fallen first Adam. We will fail to come to the revelation that all of what we have inherited from the first Adam is to be left on the cross rather than continually being preoccupied with it as if it were still to be the bases of our hope and foundation of who we are.

Our fellowships will be worldly, even if replete with conversation salted with Christian scriptures, and our carnal standards for measuring spirituality will be on the bases of the same things the Bible says the gentiles seek. But we were told to instead seek first His kingdom, not as a shortcut back to this one so we can content ourselves here, but to that we can be content in all circumstances, knowing whom we have believed, and that He is faithful and just to keep that which we

have committed unto Him against that day. While God's word assures us that He knows the things we daily needs, yet He also insists that the provision for those things not be the ulterior motive for our seeking our completeness by faith in Christ. Our heart will be where our treasure is. If our life is hid in Christ in God, and we long to be clothed with Him, than all those things that we daily need God says He will then add to us.

Without the Gospel, there is always that inborn tendency in man to need to differentiate himself from his fellow man. To elevate his qualities and standing above others.

Many people will actually favor strict systems requiring specific behavior, actions or deeds, only to ensure at their compliance they have the satisfaction, and are able to base their self esteem, by a clear measurement of their qualities and achievements against those who have failed to meet those specified standards.

Therefore there are two types of truth that men seek. One that justifies them, and validates themselves, and the other truth that clearly delineates our true standing before God. It is then we are ready to receive God's salvation in Christ.

God is looking for those who will worship Him in spirit and in truth. One cannot be in Christ, and have the spirit of Christ in them, while still having a mindset based on building on the old foundation of the fallen nature. Truth in the innermost parts means we come to God without our fig leaves, and seek the clothing He provides, as we are to be verily clothed in Christ (Galatians 3:27). It is allowing our true measure before God's standard of Holiness and truth, not our own, that brings us in humility to the place where we seek His offer of salvation in Christ, no longer putting confidence in the flesh.

**Romans 8:5-11** For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.

This is why the Bible tells us that the mind set on the flesh produces strife, jealousies, contentions, gossip and slander. The standards we choose to measure ourselves might be as simple as keeping up with the latest fashions in clothing, and looking with disdain on those not wearing the latest styles, or it may be in the realm of physical fitness, perhaps in the realm of racism, or it may be in something far more extensive and complicated such as a racial political and religious ideologies such as we have recently seen in Europe or the religious cast system in India which even today relegates millions to the status of untouchable.

And we can hide our murderous intentions by claiming that the judgment we are directing to those around us are deserved and a consequence of the system, and not that of our murderous hearts. The Bible reminds us that Cain slew his brother because his deeds were evil compared to his brothers. It is out of fruit of the mind set on the flesh, the fruit of animosity of man to man as he seeks to measure himself by himself and those around him, with his eyes fixed on the external, that will create the unrest and prevent the social cohesion that the Bible says is the natural fruit of the spirit among those who are joined by faith in the Body of Christ.

Sectarianism, divisions, factions, when these begin to be produced in the behavior of a religious social group, Paul said, these things must be so that men may know who is approved amongst themselves.

We do not have stars in the social media because there are extra special people, we have stars because we seek them as a sailor searches for the North star. And so each season, individuals are chosen and groomed to take their place as the latest icon by which everyone measures success and popularity. What the greatest numbers believe and approve will always be of the utmost concern and important to those who measure themselves by the external and seek to know what it is they must do to gain eternal life, or as seen in temporal terms, inclusion in the safety of the dominant social group.

In politics, religion, fashion, it is the division itself which serves the function and purpose needed for how we are orienting ourselves by ourselves, rather than the particular truth that is being used as the standard of differentiation and measurement.

The question we usually fail to ask at the end of the day is, are the means and standards we use to justify ourselves sufficient and extensive enough in the issues they concern themselves to meet the standards of God Himself. If there was a law or system that we could follow, some code of conduct that we were from the heart able to obey and meet its requirements, there would then have been no need for Jesus to be born and to die on the cross and raised again. There would be no need for God to become like man to make a new bridge between the two. Instead we would, using the practices and techniques prescribed by all the world's religions but one, be in the process of man becoming like God.

In the last days men will not live idealistically unless those ideals allow man to remain focused on himself as the center of his universe.

Many folk, according to the world's standards, are very nice people, pleasant to get along with, they show and exercise a concern for others, yet they are offended by exclusivity of the Gospel, and its pronouncement that all have sinned. They are looking for a God that meets their standards and that fits what they want. They are not looking for the God who is there.

And while there is always the complaint that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is too exclusive in a world filled with many different kinds of beliefs and faiths, yet at the matter of where the cross is applied, mankind's orientation to God and himself takes one of only two positions. Are they accepting the grace of God by faith in Christ, or working out our own salvation from our finite fallen condition on the bases of what we do and the value the currency and exchange of our works with man and God.

We are not talking here about mere economics or the exchange of goods and services at fair market value, and men needing to do a good days work for a good days pay. We are here talking about those things that are the foundation, and the works and material we build on that foundation for who and what we are as we live and move and have our being. God is offering Himself once again in Christ as a replacement for the finite foundation we found ourselves with after the fall of man from God's presence as man believed the lie that he could manage without trusting God's character and instead become as God by attempting to know as He knows.

And it is in that mindset, with the mind set on the flesh, the external things, that with the mind set on measuring our merits by our outward appearance and good works, yet inwardly it is still the fallen nature that is producing the corruption of enmity and strife which results in a life of hypocrisy. And often times, that inner enmity between man, God and the self, is simply allowed to come out and be expressed within sanctioned areas where it is not recognized as the product of the carnal nature, but instead it is justified as righteous indignation against those who do not agree to the standards that those judging have chosen for themselves by which justify and measure themselves.

Religion, and politics, are simply the vehicle for self justification, which always brings with it the necessary counter part of projecting a lesser standard of value on others, thus inversely elevating those maintaining their group cohesion and self esteem and identification by common assent to the given ideology, doctrine and/or social behavior.

All faiths and beliefs in the world, but one, allow men to start from the position of himself, and work his own way from the finite to the eternal, whether in cooperation with God, or by himself becoming a deified being. it is only Christianity that places the cross firmly in the path of mans progress and says man must be born again, all efforts reliance and confidence in the flesh must cease, it must be left as dead crucified with Christ, and a new life begun with faith in Him, and deeds then done as a response to His grace and love, are to be built on the foundation of Christ in whom we are not completing ourselves, but in Him, because we are complete.

We are then able to give without hypocrisy, without thought or calculation of the return merits we will win for ourselves. But in a new and living way, with the law now written on our hearts, man is now free to truly forgiving and loving as man has been loved and forgiving by God in truly realizing the need, and recognizing the gift, receiving by faith in Christ rather than ourselves.

While there is great equality in the body of Christ in that all are one in Him, at the same time there is no room for man's pride, and attempting to continue to distinguish himself on the bases of his own particular merits or deeds. And it is the affront of the cross, the offence of the Gospel that distinguishes Christianity from all the other world religions and beliefs, and at the same time places all those other believe systems into one of two categories, those based on man, and that one that is based on the grace of God in Christ.

We see the mistake that Ananias, and his wife Sapphira made when they attempting to gain fellowship amongst the new believers. They thought that it was

merely a matter of the external appearance of selling all their goods that was the bases for their inclusion, and as such, were inwardly reluctant to place all the goods on which they still placed their trust, into the offering.

Yet the Holy Spirit was jealous for the early church, a church where goods and charity were not being offered as a bases of commerce in exchange for religious merits or membership, but rather, as each truly came to understand and receive by faith the new life offered in Christ, and as the believers no longer identified themselves and depended on their worldly possessions, so there was true giving out of concern for the common need, not the need of the individuals self esteem to not appear common. God is truly looking for those who will worship Him in spirit and in truth.

**Acts 5:1-11** But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession. And he kept back part of the proceeds, his wife also being aware of it, and brought a certain part and laid it at the apostles' feet. But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself? While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God."

Then Ananias, hearing these words, fell down and breathed his last. So great fear came upon all those who heard these things. And the young men arose and wrapped him up, carried him out, and buried him.

Now it was about three hours later when his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. And Peter answered her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for so much?"

She said, "Yes, for so much."

Then Peter said to her, “How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out.” Then immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. And the young men came in and found her dead, and carrying her out, buried her by her husband. So great fear came upon all the church and upon all who heard these things.

**Hebrews 4:1-16** Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it. For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it. For we who have believed do enter that rest, as He has said:

“So I swore in My wrath,  
‘ They shall not enter My rest,’”

although the works were finished from the foundation of the world. For He has spoken in a certain place of the seventh day in this way: “And God rested on the seventh day from all His works”; and again in this place: “They shall not enter My rest.”

Since therefore it remains that some must enter it, and those to whom it was first preached did not enter because of disobedience, again He designates a certain day, saying in David, “Today,” after such a long time, as it has been said:

“ Today, if you will hear His voice,  
Do not harden your hearts.”

For if Joshua had given them rest, then He would not afterward have spoken of another day. There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His.

Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience. For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.

Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

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