

# Faith and Works LII

The Contemporary and Biblical Contexts

Col. 2:8

# Destinations

As we move closer to the final events of the last days, many are rushing to and fro, but all are headed to the same destination, unless they turn from that broad highway, and choose the narrow path, the path Jesus spoke of when He said that He was the way, the truth and the life, and that no one could come to the Father, but by Him.

In the last days, the apostles of Jesus warned that men would increasingly have their attention on themselves. This is why the trend in spiritual circles has shifted from prayer and petitions being made known to God who is to be trusted to have heard and thus act based on the imputed right standing of those coming to Him clothed in His Son, joint heirs with Him, to instead, redefining prayer as a spiritual exercise that we use to control on the bases of ourselves, what will be manifested in our personal experience of reality.

It really does not matter if we tell people we have found God and still look like we are in search of ourselves. For many who do not understand the true message of the Gospel and how to abide in Christ, they have simply exchanged one mode of transportation for another on a self made journey on the same road the rest of the world travels.

The broad road that Jesus spoke of, on which many travel to their destruction, is the same road that mankind has been on, going in the same direction, ever since leaving the garden and intimate fellowship with God.

God places Jesus as the end point and destination for all those who would seek to be reunited with Him.

Christianity and growth in Christ is the process of transferring our dependence and hope in ourselves to pay the debt of our fallen humanity and instead learning to rest in the completeness we have in Christ.

When Jesus spoke to His disciples, that they must pick up their cross and follow Him, He was speaking of the same process that Paul describes concerning his own personal walk in Philippians chapter 3.

**Philippians 3:4-6** though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.

**Matthew 10:38** And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me.

**Matthew 16:24** Then Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.

**Luke 9:23** Then He said to them all, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.

**Philippians 3:7-14** But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. 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, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

The old nature is not something we crucify ourselves, it is something we let go of, and leave crucified with Christ. What activates the flesh is having the mind set on it. Those who walk in the spirit have their minds set on Christ, and take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ. And as Paul said in Galatians chapter 2, we reckon ourselves as dead to the flesh and its demands to pay its debt on behalf of eternity, and without looking back, we now say that to live is Christ, and to die is gain. Our focus is on the risen Christ and His finished work, rather than our ability to finish our works by the fallen nature we have inherited from the first Adam. James asks in his letter, why the wars and quarrels, are we not demonstrating our carnality, our mind still set on the flesh?

**James 4:1-6** Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures. Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, “The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously”?

But He gives more grace. Therefore He says:

“ God resists the proud,  
But gives grace to the humble.”

In all the world's religions and philosophies there is concern with the value granted to the individual or the self, either by inclusion within a special group, or by merits earned, or by meeting the standards of a particular prescription for outward behavior. In Christianity however, and this uniquely so, there is concern for the value of Christ which is of ultimate eternal importance, for flesh and bone cannot inherit the kingdom of God. And that value is to be shared equally by those who by faith are members of His body.

In our normal state of mind and frame of reference, we are not looking for the answer the Bible is providing mankind in the Gospel, primarily because we are seeking solutions to a different problem. The problem we are habitually by nature trying to solve is what must we do to be saved? With the assumption that if we just had the right knowledge, we would be able to perform it.

**John 6: 28-29** Then they said to Him, “What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?” Jesus answered and said to them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.”

It is a simple answer, but it is a profound shift in our normal orientation both to ourselves and to what God has actually done in history by providing a bridge between Himself and fallen man in Christ Jesus.

Israel did not realize the condition it was in regard to the covenant God has established with them until the fiery serpents appeared, and men started physically dying. It was then that Moses was directed to lift the bronze serpent on a pole. When Christ is lifted up, and men are drawn to Him, those who are drawn are those Jesus identified in his sermon on the mount, those who would come were those who were poor in spirit, those who hungered and thirsted for the righteousness of God.

Such was the condition of those who entered into the repentance of John the Baptist. He was not calling for sinners to become religious, he was calling all, rich and poor, slave and free, male and female to be ready for baptism into the body of Christ, leaving their old nature as dead under the symbol of water baptism. And so Jesus too, was baptized by John, to fulfill all righteousness.

For although He himself knew no sin and had unbroken fellowship with the Father, yet He was to taste the death due to sin that all mankind must face, that those who would place their faith in Him after He had ascended to the Father, taking their confidence off of the flesh and its works within the current fallen world system. Those who saw the light of the glory of God in the face of Christ, the Gospel, would be those who were no longer trying to hide in darkness, but were willing to be exposed in their sin and admit their need for a savior.

One of the first pre-requisites for following a map or set of directions, is not only knowing the destination, but knowing where we are starting from.

The Bible begins its presentation by establishing man's beginnings, and where he has ended after the fall. It is the bible's way of saying, "you are here". And thereafter, through history, we see the progressive revelation of God and his purpose on behalf of His fallen creation, his bringing light to a lost people who are in darkness and in need of a savior. When all possibilities are exhausted, in conditional covenants and law, it is God Himself, by His own arm, who then brings about salvation on behalf of His lost creation that He so loves, that He is not willing that any should perish.

Jesus could say to a woman in adultery that her sins were forgiven. And while it is true that only God can forgive sins that are all ultimately against Himself, Jesus could do so in addition to being God in the flesh, by virtue of the fact that when He pronounced a man or woman forgiven, He was not simply erasing a notation in a ledger somewhere, He was actually certifying that the debt they owned was to be paid by Himself.

Understanding what it means to receive Christ as our Lord and Savior in the context of the Gospels, is essential to distinguishing between a moral code of law which proscribes certain external patterns of behavior, and the new covenant that God spoke of through Jeremiah, where His law would be written on the very tables of man's heart, were we would serve in newness of the spirit, and not oldness of the letter.

He is looking for fruit that comes as a natural result, from the law written on the fleshy tables of a heart responding with gratitude and love for the love first shown in the act of God giving His own Son to be sin on our behalf, of a true acceptance of salvation by faith in Christ, whereby we come to the end of ourselves, and no longer seek to justify ourselves and measure ourselves by ourselves, and we leave all that behind, taken by Christ to be crucified with Him when He hung on a cross, to be complete in the risen Christ.

Knowing that Jesus is Lord and has paid for the sins of the world is simply an academic proposition, until He begins to be our own personal focus and the one in whom our faith is in, to the extent that we no longer walk through the circumstances of this world on the bases of who we are in ourselves, but rather our self esteem and our identity and the things we do are done on behalf of who He is, risen and seated at the right hand of the Father.

The acts that we see the apostles performing, the deeds and mighty works of the spirit are not a result of God enabling man to be all that man can be, they are the result of men acting on behalf of their faint in who Christ is.

For without faith it is impossible to please God.

To all who came to Jesus, whose faith was in Him, and sought a point of contact with Him because of who they believed He was, they are the ones who Jesus said had great faith. They are the ones who received the greatest benefit from contact

with Him. They were the ones who through their contact with Him received the greatest effect.

God granted that signs and wonders were performed through the hands of the apostles not to declare how great the apostles were, but to declare and confirm how great was the message they were proclaiming as God's ambassadors.

We are not the message, we can only simply demonstrate that we ourselves have believed the message and show the results of that belief in our lives as we respond in both forgiving and loving others as we have truly believed, received and rested in the forgiveness and love of God proclaimed in the Gospel of Christ. And receiving by God's grace the empowerment that He gives to all who learn to put their trust and faith in Him for all that they are and all that they do.

Our journey is ended when we come to the place where we are standing by faith in Christ.

The final answer that God has given man for his eternal search does not answer the question of who gets judged for being bad, for all have sinned and fallen short of the Glory of God, none of the sons of the first fallen Adam can abide His presence, for He is a consuming fire. The answer He gives in the fullness of time is to demonstrate His love, and provide His Son for the redemption of those who will repent from dead works exercised in the capabilities of their own fallen natures utilizing the elemental things of this fallen world system, and instead place their faith and receive as a child their new life in union with God through faith in being a joint heir with Christ.

**1 Peter 3:21-22** There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him.

**Philippians 3:3** For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.

**Colossians 3:1-11** If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.

Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them.

But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all.

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