

Faith and Works LVII

The Contemporary and Biblical Contexts

Col. 2:8

Bits and Pieces

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Introduction

We see through a glass darkly, the Apostle Paul wrote. There are those who insist on all questions being answered to their satisfaction before acknowledging a truth that already conforms to their criteria for knowledge. And while many would demand that all that can be known of God be completely comprehensible according to what they themselves are able to intellectually understand and experience, yet through the ages the eternal truth of the Gospel has reaped a harvest among those who hear and believe it's simple message. This has been possible because each age has had to take the risk of stepping outside the intellectual consensus of its time, and rediscover the simple truth of the Gospel.

2 Corinthians 11:3

But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.

1 Corinthians 1:22-24

For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

Without illumination both spiritual and in the written witness of God's interaction with man through history as recorded in the writings of the Bible, we are always learning but never coming to a knowledge of the truth. We seem to have progressed to the age Daniel spoke of when he said that many in the last days of this age would rush to and fro, and knowledge would increase or be accumulated (Daniel 12:4).

Without a focus on God's kingdom, and instead focusing on the kingdom of man we do not anticipate eternity, we instead try to realize it here.

We are the generation perhaps closest to the end of this temporal fallen age, eternity and the new heavens and earth are just over the horizon, dawn is about to break, yet, we seem to be making ourselves quite at home here in the darkness. Men are boldly speaking on behalf of a God whose written testimony they only know incompletely, borrowing words from each other second hand, adding speculation to supposition.

But concerning the simple truth of the Gospel, there is often an incomplete picture being presented, not all the original puzzle pieces are there, and other pieces have been added from other pictures. Trying to fit it all together into what we think it should look like is a never ending process.

With all the information technology available, one would think that somewhere there would be a complete presentation of the truth of the Gospel. But it has been often sought not as an end in itself, but as a means to another purpose. All too often the modern presentation of the Gospel will have portions of its truth removed, and in the place of those missing pieces other teachings are added as man seeks to fill his itching ears.

Many sought Jesus for the loaves and the fish, but would have nothing to do with Him when He spoke of the bread and the wine, His life, and our need to discontinue to build on the old foundation inherited from the first Adam, and start anew, as a child, building with gold refined by fire on the new foundation of Christ Himself.

John 6:26-29

Jesus answered them and said, "Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him."

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.”

Only an incomplete Gospel that no longer has Jesus in the center can serve the needs of men who seek only the loaves and the fishes. To those not offended by the complete Gospel and who do not turn away, and accept the reality of the need to die to the old nature and who are willing to pick up their cross, it is they who will follow Jesus on behalf of the true food, the bread and the wine, His body and His blood, the true life in Him.

John 3:16-21

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

“He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.”

2 Corinthians 2:14-17

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. And who is sufficient for these things? For we are not, as so many, peddling the word of God; but as of sincerity, but as from God, we speak in the sight of God in Christ.

Seeking the First Piece

Too often the Gospel is being falsely presented as a resource to put into service on behalf of the day to day temporal needs of man's finite lives, rather than man's finite life, on behalf of the true complete Gospel, being put into service on behalf of eternity.

Jesus said we were to seek first His Kingdom, the kingdom we are transported into by faith in Christ, and then the day to day needs that all men share in common would be attended to by God.

Matthew 6:24-33

"No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature?"

"So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?"

"Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you."

But what kind of Gospel do we have when only those pieces that are useful for the business of meeting our daily temporal needs are considered? In such a system, Jesus is no longer the foundation, we are. We are not abiding in Him, our life hidden with Christ in God, instead, we are concerned with Him aiding us.

All too often, the modern "relevant" gospel being currently presented places man in the center of focus and concern, and the Gospel becomes a means to advancing one's capabilities to gain the things man seeks in his dependency on himself and the weak and worthless elemental things of this world.

Whenever we are seeking and searching the scriptures on behalf of our endeavor to continue to build on the old foundation we will inevitably end up with an incomplete Gospel. The Gospel is only complete when we come to that place where we realize that all that we do is on behalf of eternity, and not on behalf of the finite temporal circumstances in which we daily find ourselves while we yet inhabit these clay vessels.

You search the scriptures, Jesus said, because you suppose that in them you will find the way to gain eternal life, but it is the very scriptures that testify of Christ, yet man is unwilling to leave his own foundation and efforts, pick up his cross, and place all on and in Christ Himself.

John 5:39-40

You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life.

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."

An Incomplete Picture

The full complete uncompromised Gospel is a remedy for pathological narcissism, and self centeredness. The Gospel is not an excuse for such tendencies, unless it is presented in an incomplete fashion, or mixed with other belief systems. It is those with itching ears who are seeking for such an excuse. And there is a plethora of those who, no doubt aided by modern media to allow those with charisma and persuasive words to creep into households, are seeking to draw people to themselves for their own temporal gain.

Timothy 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. And from such people turn away!

There are those seeking to excuse their licentious and hedonistic practices who will find many parts of the Bible inconvenient, and will thus dispense with them. There are others seeking to justify their political ambitions and would do so with carefully selected passages from scripture that would seem to fit their cause.

And yet the complete revelation of God's word would not only exclude these issues the focus would instead not be on man but on Christ. And our being complete in Him rather than seeking to complete ourselves through some spiritual aid derived from bits and pieces of God's word.

We see in the letters of Jesus to the churches in the book of Revelations that the church institution itself soon became a vehicle not to free men from the bondage of death, but instead actually become an accelerant and a means of

perpetuating and augmenting that dependency on the foundation of the fallen nature inherited from the first Adam.

We keep wanting to harvest bits and pieces of the complete revelation of God and stuff them into our barns along with all the other temporal things on which we are depending for our daily satisfaction and with which we are preoccupied to the exclusion of concern and focus on the Gospel of life in Christ Jesus.

Many people think they are hearing the Word of God week after week from their favorite religious source, yet overall truth presented in the Bible is usually missing from what is being taught. Yet because we have filled in the missing pieces with pieces of our own from other sources, it seems complete. People could walk into many modern churches with only a third or less of the pages in their Bible, and they would never miss them as the topics in the missing pages will most likely never be referenced in any modern "relevant" teaching or message.

The devil can manipulate those in darkness, those without the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ, by utilizing temporal man's fear of death. We seek to avoid death through attempting to control our circumstances, through the goods we own, the value we given us by other people who are integral to our emotional or physical well being. To earn, or control all the weak and elemental support systems of the fallen world system is the essence of the motivating factor of all religions and sorceries.

And so man is tricked in his darkness to remain shackled to this fallen world system through his continued reliance on the foundation of the fallen spiritual and physical condition inherited from the first fallen Adam. And yet the doors of Hades have been unlocked, Jesus is knocking, and we have but to open our hearts and minds and by faith come into union with the Father through identification with the life of Christ Himself, leaving behind all that is not built on the foundation of Christ as worthless.

All non Gospel systems of thought concern how man can secure his own throne at the center of his reality, and how to ensure its continuance for eternity.

Spiritual gifts, for instance, should never be sought as an end in themselves. In the book of Acts, we see the former sorcerer Simon seeking spiritual gifts as a means of advancing his own capabilities and power. Jesus reminded the disciples that they should not rejoice that the devils were obedient to them when they commanded them in the authority Christ had given them, but rather that their names were written in heaven.

Luke 10:19-21

Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you. Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven.”

The Big Picture

We must be careful of any thought or attitude that mitigates or dilutes the full effectiveness of the Gospel. The Gospel bears its intended fruit when believed to the point that it becomes the primary influence on our daily lives.

The history of the true Christian faith reveals men and women motivated by the position they share in eternity in Christ, not those motivated by the pragmatic concerns of securing the best circumstances and longevity of the clay vessels inherited from the first Adam. In the mature body of Christ, the orientation of the members to themselves, to God, and each other is on behalf of Christ, and no longer on the external appraisal of man according to the world's value system.

2 Corinthians 5:12-21

For we do not commend ourselves again to you, but give you opportunity to boast on our behalf, that you may have an answer for those who boast in appearance and not in heart. For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; or if we are of sound mind, it is for you. For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.

Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.

Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

We are told to seek first His kingdom. Then would our temporal daily needs be seen to, when left in the care of our loving Father. We are to abide in Him, in all circumstances, not seek our treasures here.

It is on behalf of eternity, in our security in knowing that the anchor is firm behind the veil of this temporal life, and that He is faithful and able to keep that which we have committed unto Him against that day when our faith shall be sight, it is on this foundation that we are to operate and be content with in the midst of the daily circumstances of our lives.

2 Timothy 1:12

For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day.

The true Gospel orients man to cease being centered in ourselves, and to be born again, centered in Christ. To abide in Christ means we are no longer seeking to abide in ourselves. To be clothed with Christ means we are no longer trying to sow together fig leaves by which to cover ourselves.

There is thus a dividing rift between those who seek religion as a means of gain, and those who are complete in Christ, who no longer seek to add or build up themselves with the elementary things of this world, but are abiding and resting in Christ, clothed in Him. It is to those, regardless of the worlds natural condition, that God can add all that is necessary for their daily needs, as they will not be

moved off the rock of their spiritual foundation, and no matter what they possess in this life, their heart will remain fixed on their treasure in heaven.

2 Corinthians 4:1-18

Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we do not lose heart. But we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them. For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus' sake. For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us. We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed— always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So then death is working in us, but life in you.

And since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, "I believed and therefore I spoke," we also believe and therefore speak, knowing that He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus, and will present us with you. For all things are for your sakes, that grace, having spread through the many, may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God.

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.

Colossians 3:1-4

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.

John 14:1-3

“Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.

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