

Faith and Works LXV

The Contemporary and Biblical Contexts

Col. 2:8

Faith

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Introduction

We are told that a quality to be sought in any who would be a leader is that of having a personal religious faith, which commonly at its essence is understood to be the ability of one to orient their direction and inspiration from a point of reference beyond the mundane temporal experiences that normally consume our daily attention.

And of course, if the things of this world form our only horizon, it renders us helpless under the inertia of the everyday cares of life. We would be unable to find motivation or inspiration beyond our own daily base needs or feelings. This would render void any goal that required the sacrifice of our personal comfort or possessions, there would be no motivation for self sacrifice.

Matthew 6:31-34

“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. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

Yet, if we are to live and act on behalf of an ideal that presents a goal beyond what we might gain in this world, and on behalf of which we are to order our lives, are any goals that transcend those that are common within this temporal existence the same?

What then is the distinction, if any, that is to be made between what is commonly considered faith by our modern age, and that timeless faith of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, He who the Bible declares is the same, yesterday, today, and for eternity?

Ephesians 4:4-6

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

Is the faith of a polytheistic Mormon the same as the faith of the first century Christian believer in Jesus Christ? Are all faiths equivalent to that of those who willingly sacrifice their own lives trying to kill as many additional innocent victims as possible, in the hope of being rewarded with unlimited access to the very carnal pleasures they religiously tried to avoid in this life?

There are also those who have made themselves wealthy by promising to help their customers grow their own faith. Is their faith product really the same as the faith understood and practiced by the early New Testament church?

Jude 1:3

Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.

It will be the purpose of the following investigation to attempt to differentiate Biblical Christian faith from non-Christian faith, if only to help answer the question that Jesus asked His disciples when He spoke of the conditions He would find on returning to Earth as the conquering King of kings.

Luke 18:8

Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?

Faith and Feelings

Christian faith is not something we always feel, but Christian faith is always something we are to believe. Christian faith is not the generic belief or exercise of one's will power or the ability to perform miracles. Christian faith is belief in the Gospel of Jesus Christ and living on behalf of that truth, with signs following.

We see something of this in the gospel account of the disciples who came to Jesus and asked Him why they themselves were unable to cast out an illness

Matthew 17:14-21

And when they had come to the multitude, a man came to Him, kneeling down to Him and saying, "Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is an epileptic and suffers severely; for he often falls into the fire and often into the water. So I brought him to Your disciples, but they could not cure him."

Then Jesus answered and said, "O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you? Bring him here to Me." And Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of him; and the child was cured from that very hour.

Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, "Why could we not cast it out?"

So Jesus said to them, "Because of your unbelief; for assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you. However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting."

The faith that Jesus was speaking about to His disciples was the same kind of faith that we see in the Gospel account of the centurion.

Matthew 8:8-11

The centurion answered and said, "Lord, I am not worthy that You should come under my roof. But only speak a word, and my servant will be healed. For I also am a man under authority, having soldiers under me. And I say to this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and to another, 'Come,' and he comes; and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it."

When Jesus heard it, He marveled, and said to those who followed, "Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel! And I say to you that many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven."

The centurion's faith was in who Jesus was. The centurion had confidence in the authority of Jesus. The centurion was not focused, as we so often are today, on his need for the miracle itself, and how to produce it.

The same faith that works in the authority of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit to do God's will, is the same faith that one must have, that of faith in Jesus as the Messiah, for one's own salvation.

John 8:24

Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins."

Romans 10:9

... if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.

Colossians 2:6-7

As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.

Paul speaks of the necessary growth of the body in the revelation of Jesus Christ in his letter to the Ephesians.

Ephesians 1:15-23

Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers: that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come.

And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

Christian faith is not about our feelings having been taken captive, nor are we to depend on our emotions to “feel” the truth of the Gospel. Faith is not about how we feel; it is about what we believe. It is taking captive the thoughts that we often in our weakness entertain that seek to rise up against the truth of what the Gospel declares that Christ has done, and which if allowed to dominate or take command of our thinking, will interfere with our ability to focus and rest in Him. We are to abide in the finished work of Christ and seek to reinforce that knowledge of who we are on behalf of His finished work by word and example on behalf of the fellow members of the body of Christ.

2 Corinthians 10:4-5

For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ

Colossians 3:16

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

Fasting in the Biblical sense is of course a voluntary placing of one's self in a position of want, all the more to realize the need to seek and depend on the strength that God supplies. It is not a process whereby man makes himself more spiritually powerful. It is the process where a person voluntarily lays down their power and become aware of their need to seek and rely on the power of God.

Philippians 4:12-13

I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

There are often times in the life of a Christian when they can become too confident in our own abilities, and begin to operate trusting in their own capabilities. It is when we begin to consider faith as a quality or ability that we possess and operate that we can take ourselves out of the position where God can work through us. Faith itself cannot be our focus. It is our faith in Christ Himself that is to lead us to work on behalf of who His is, not how spiritual we think we have become in our own strength.

In the following account from the New Testament, Peter explains that a miracle he has just performed in which a lame man was made to walk, did not happen as a result of Peter's own power or Godliness, but rather it was his faith in the name of Christ and the faith that comes through believing in His name, that the miracle took place.

Acts 3:11-12

Now as the lame man who was healed held on to Peter and John, all the people ran together to them in the porch which is called Solomon's, greatly amazed. So when Peter saw it, he responded to the people: "Men of Israel, why do you marvel at this? Or why look so intently at us, as though by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?"

Acts 3:16

And His name, through faith in His name, has made this man strong, whom you see and know. Yes, the faith which comes through Him has given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all.

Faith Has a Focus

Faith cannot be understood in the Biblical Christian context when faith is itself the focus. The Christian New Testament concept of faith is that it is an orientation to an unseen present and future potential in Christ that has become of more importance in motivating the heart and actions than the circumstances of the present experience within the current fallen world system.

Hebrews 11:1

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

Romans 8:24

For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees?

Therefore to attempt to understand all belief systems by focusing on faith itself rather than the object of a particular faith, and the resulting actions on behalf of that faith, will fail to distinguish the truly unique position held by the Gospel.

Christian faith begins when Jesus is lifted up, and we are drawn out of dependency on ourselves, and into rest in Him. It is only clothed in Christ and at rest in His finished work that we can do all things in Him, having died to that which we were bound by the law, the fallen nature into which all of the descendants of the first fallen Adam are born.

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.

Christians through the work of the Holy Spirit and His indwelling of the believer (Ephesians 1:13) receive various types of illumination concerning the object of their faith, yet faith will always be focused on a future potential that often will not find a counterpart in our daily experience.

2 Corinthians 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.

Indeed, the Apostle Paul's faith is directed to, and fixed on, a stabilizing point of unchangeable reference on which he relies for all that he is and all that he is called to do. That point of reference is Christ Himself.

Philippians 4:11-13

Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

The validity of Christian faith can be confirmed in daily experience, but the object of faith will never be contained within those experiences. Before the Holy Spirit can give us the power to act in God's strength, we first must receive the revelation from the Holy Spirit, in our heart, soul and mind, of who Christ is.

When our minds have thus been renewed with the knowledge of Christ, the fruit of one who has truly received and believed the Gospel, the effect of true

faith on the will, emotions, and the motivation to act on others behalf, will be in evidence.

2 Thessalonians 1:3

We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other

1 Peter 1:22

Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart

1 John 3:16

By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

We see men moved by their faith, yet the object of their faith may not be seen by natural vision. The observable circumstances will not always account for the conviction and peace that is the result of true faith in Christ.

1 Peter 3:14-16

But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you are blessed. "And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled." But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear; having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed.

Hebrews 12:1-2

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

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.

True Christian faith is in Jesus Himself and the significance of who He is and what He has done on behalf of the believer. The object of Christian faith can be expressed and communicated, but the worlds used are not themselves the object of faith, they are but a description of the object of that faith. The reality of that truth is confirmed by the works of the Holy Spirit, or responsiveness to the influence or revelation in the inner man of Christ that is supplied by the Holy Spirit.

1 Corinthians 2:10-16

But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.

These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one. For "who has known the mind of the LORD that he may instruct Him?" But we have the mind of Christ.

Ephesians 1:13-14

In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.

Ephesians 5:8-14

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), finding out what is acceptable to the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret. But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light. Therefore He says:

*"Awake, you who sleep,
Arise from the dead,
And Christ will give you light."*

2 Corinthians 4:6

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.

Galatians 1:11-12

But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Trusting Faith

Christian faith can be contrasted between control and trust. When we seek faith to gain control over our lives and our environment, we are simply seeking to extend our own power and authority, trusting in ourselves to make the decisions concerning our situation and state. But Christian faith asks that we do not doubt, not in the possibility of the miracle itself, but in the love and authority of Christ to allow us to become members of God's household.

In Christ the believer is no longer slaves working for a wage, but joint heirs with Christ, clothed in His likeness, members of His body. In this is the confidence and faith the Bible speaks of achieved, when Christ, who He is, and what He has accomplished on our behalf, is the foundation. It is not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God with a clean conscience through Jesus Christ that allows prayer to be effective.

1 John 3:21

Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God

1 John 5:14

This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.

Christian faith is confidence in the ability, the intentions, the power and authority of the one in whom we have placed our trust. It is not a capability that we work up in ourselves by sheer will power or mental visualization such as is taught by those seeking to reinterpret the Christian faith as generic spirituality.

When Jesus asked His disciples if when He returned, He would truly find faith on earth, he had just finished in the Gospel narrative with teachings concerning the persistent widow. What He was illustrating was that if even the

unjust can be counted on to respond, how much more can we be certain that our prayers are heard by one who has already, in the sacrifice of His only begotten Son on behalf of sinful fallen man, be counted on to work on behalf of those who come before Him clothed in His Son?

Luke 18:1-8

Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart, saying: "There was in a certain city a judge who did not fear God nor regard man. Now there was a widow in that city; and she came to him, saying, 'Get justice for me from my adversary.' And he would not for a while; but afterward he said within himself, 'Though I do not fear God nor regard man, yet because this widow troubles me I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.'"

Then the Lord said, "Hear what the unjust judge said. And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?"

There are times when faith and prayer will result in change in our circumstances. There are other times when faith will be the anchor that goes beyond the veil to provide contentment and stability when in the natural world there is none to be found. In all circumstances, He is to be the stability of our times. He is our peace. Though in this world we may have tribulations, He has overcome the world, and we are complete in Him.

Though we may not meet the worlds standards of greatness, nor win the praise of men, yet God's love, and the eternal treasure He offers us in His Son as we abide in Him, far outweighs any of the confidence men might have from the goods they may have temporarily stored in their barns. We are to seek contentment from the treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.

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.

Romans 8:31-39

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

As it is written:

*“For Your sake we are killed all day long;
We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.”*

Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, or height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Packaging Faith

Many who have created or followed hybrid teachings that combine Christian terminology with Gnostic and other similar philosophies from philosophical movements such as, for instance, the "New Thought" movement of the late nineteenth century, will interpret Hebrews 11:1 to mean that faith is in itself a substance, and often, when the idea has taken hold, there will be a buying or selling of faith, and a focus on measuring how much faith one has gained. There will be a constant seeking after the latest ways to manufacture and increase in the possession and operation of faith. Yet the context of that scripture in Hebrews 11:1 in regards to the evidence of faith is no different from what is used in the letter of James:

James 2:14-24

What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe — and tremble! But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." And he was called the friend of God. You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only.

Jesus told His disciples that faith itself was not something in itself to be measured as a substance. If we seek faith as a power or capability exercised by our own will, we have simply placed as a foundation our own force of will in a fallen body. Apart from God, all those that are not born again in Christ face the same death that man's forefather Adam was promised on committing the act that would result in the fall of all mankind.

But faith is not to be sought as an object in itself; it is not an exercise in the power of our own will or mental exertion. It is simply the conviction, in the heart of those who truly believe and receive the truth of the message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and that what God has said and continues to testify concerning His only begotten Son Jesus is true and that our salvation consists in resting in His completed work on our behalf. Preaching Christ produces faith; preaching faith produces a focus away from Christ and on to the individual's performance and capabilities.

Luke 17:6

So the Lord said, "If you have faith as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be pulled up by the roots and be planted in the sea,' and it would obey you.

John 14:12-14

"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father. And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it.

Faith is therefore better understood not by looking at the action of faith itself, but at the object of faith by which the actions are motivated.

Hebrews 12:1-2

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

We often mistake faith as a work that we do, rather than a surrender in which we allow God to work when we have truly come to realize the futility of seeking to gain eternity based on the foundation of our fallen Adamic nature.

2 Chronicles 16:9

For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him. In this you have done foolishly; therefore from now on you shall have wars.”

2 Cor. 12:7-10

And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. 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. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Mark 8:34

When He had called the people to Himself, with His disciples also, He said to them, “Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.

Galatians 2:17-21

“But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is Christ therefore a minister of sin? Certainly not! For if I build again those things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor. For I through the law died to the law that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain.”

Emphasis on the technique of faith rather than the object of faith has consistently, and without fail, led to non-Biblical teachings that reduce the person and role of Jesus.

If greed makes an idol out of gain, then pursuing faith as an increase in our own strength leads us deeper into dependence on ourselves, taking our eyes off of Jesus, and increasingly centering our attention on ourselves.

It is only when we surrender who and what we are from being based on ourselves, and instead trust in who we are eternally in Christ, letting go of all that we might have taken pride of based on what we have built on our fallen nature, it is then that we truly enter into the life of faith based on the person of Jesus Christ.

Philippians 3:7-16

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.

Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you. Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind.

Emphasis in modern teachings of faith are often placed not on what Christ has done, and our resting in Him and then working under the authority derived from His authority. Instead there is an emphasis on seeing Jesus as simply a role model, and if He is considered at all, it is only to seek to learn how to operate faith as did Jesus. To achieve that perspective, Jesus is often portrayed not as the Son of God, eternally pre-existing, very God and man, but rather as no more than a man, and the argument usually then proceeds to insist that therefore all men are said to be able to do likewise, because both Jesus and man now begin from the same equivalent starting position in their efforts to wield spiritual power.

John 17:1-5

Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said:

“Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You, as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him. And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do. And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.

Thus non-Biblical doctrines may teach that Jesus died spiritually, only to be revived as a born again being through some faith technique. Using that scenario as a pattern that all men are supposed to follow in their own search for eternity, completely misses what the Bible teaches concerning membership of the believer in Christ in the true church, a member in the very body of Christ Himself, not by releasing or developing the same divine nature as Jesus, but by faith, partaking of His divine nature, and through Him, and only through Him, coming into eternal life through re-union with God.

2 Peter 1:2-5

Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

One system, the non-Christian system, emphasizes how to increase the ability of man who is not fallen, just hindered through lack of knowledge. The true

Biblical system teaches how fallen man is crucified with Christ, and the believer then by faith is risen with Him, to be completely clothed with His likeness at His final return to restore all things under His submission.

1 Corinthians 15:20-28

But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the first fruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming. Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death. For "He has put all things under His feet." But when He says "all things are put under Him," it is evident that He who put all things under Him is excepted. Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all.

The Power of Faith

We often hear of simple folk with a very basic understanding of the Gospel seeing God perform great signs and wonders in support of their preaching of the message of salvation in Christ.

There is also a noticeable lack of any supernatural confirmation on behalf of what is being presented in our modern religious establishments, though the lack of His prescience can often be overlooked by the excellent coffee being served in the lobby cafes, as well as the first class music and relevant contemporary preaching, just the thing to boost our moral and optimism before heading off for another week of bringing home the bacon.

The excuse often made is that we don't call on God or seek Him for miracles because we are so well supplied with solutions from modern medicine, and the pills and ointments available from the local drug store. But is that the real reason we see so little evidence of God in our religious activities, as loud and well attended as many of them are?

It is not that we do not need healing, because we are so used to doctors and drug stores, it more likely is the case that we are not looking for a physician for our souls. We do not take seriously the need of our salvation and the reconciliation that God is exclusively offering through the sacrifice and resurrection of His Son, Jesus.

Jesus said that those who truly had faith in Him would have signs and wonders following in confirmation of that faith. And the response to receiving that salvation is the fruit of love, compassion and forgiveness we will show to others. Failure to understand the enormity of what God has offered mankind in the Gospel leads to complacency concerning the things of God. Complacency and carnality go hand in hand. A lukewarm attitude concerning our relationship to God through Christ will continue to progress until we remain focused on the external things that are perishing rather than the unseen things that are eternal.

The seed of the Gospel can be, and often is, choked by the day to day cares of this world, until finally we are no longer sowing the seed of the Gospel, but instead, to satisfy our itching ears, we are sowing doctrines and thoughts that anticipate, accommodate and facilitate our continued reliance on the old foundation.

In the new birth of faith in Christ, there is only one foundation that one can build on, that of Christ Himself. And what we then build will be tested and purified. It takes fire to burn away the dross, and to refine the gold, but when faith and Godliness are pursued only to the extent that they promise increase in the things of this life, a shallow and superficial spirituality will be produced. There will be little true love for God, for there will not be the deep inner awareness and conviction of our need for the great gift He offers in Christ. The Bible will then be picked over for those parts that seem to fit into our life styles and our everyday pursuits, rather than our lives being fit into the Gospel on behalf of eternity.

There have been a number of instances in man's history which some considered great moves of God, but which were in reality, men moving themselves with their own enthusiasm over the potential for their own spiritual gain, and when man moves himself, he usually ends up farther away from God. When God moves, men are drawn to God through Christ. For that is the work of the Holy Spirit, to reveal Christ, confirm the testimony of those preaching and walking in faith in the Gospel, and to edify and build up the body in Christ.

All too often so called great moves of God appeal to the carnal man simply because of the anticipation of an increase in mans own strength and capabilities.

The power of the Gospel is not then something that we apply to ourselves in order to increase our own abilities; it is something we rely on instead of ourselves.

If we would truly see God move in this day and age, then we must get out of the way, and proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ, of man reconciled to God through Christ, rather than a Gospel of man learning to become like God.

Paul wrote that in his conscious weakness, through trials, by a thorn in the flesh from Satan, that God's spiritual power perfected. It is in those times of trial, when the fires are refining the gold, which the Bible says is our faith, that we may be tempted to evaluate our circumstances based on our own capabilities and potential. It is precisely at those times we are to stand firm and fix our hope and attention on Christ.

2 Corinthians 12:9-11

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. 10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

In the body of Christ, the gifts of the spirit are for the gain and growth of all the members in Christ. But to the carnally minded, spiritual gifts are coveted as a means of personal growth, not in faith in Christ, but as a means of advancing our own capabilities, as was the case of Simon the sorcerer in the book of Acts.

The Holy spirit, as he wills, gives gifts to the members of the body of Christ, some apostles, some pastors, some prophets and teachers not to establish a hierarchy of greatness within the body, but rather, through the gifts, all of the members might achieve the same stature, that of Christ.

Here is the paradox of the Gospel. The power comes not through the increase of our own strength, but through the cross. The world system, led by the devil, would seek to raise idols of pride and ego and trust in material things above

the knowledge of Christ, that we might turn back and seek to build again on that foundation we were once to have once and for all destroyed, being baptized into the death of Jesus, that we might be risen in new life in the resurrected Christ.

Romans 6:3

Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?

Galatians 2:20

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

Christian character does not grow in complacency that is due to our contentment with the circumstances and things of this world. It takes spiritual insight and wisdom from God to understand why James would write that we should count it all joy when we face various trials and temptations.

James 1:2-5

My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.

John 16:33

These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”

Greater is He that is in the believer in Christ, then he that is in the world. It is not to the vessel of clay that we must look for His work and presence in our lives, it is to the treasure in the vessel.

2 Corinthians 4:6-7

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.

The Work of Faith

By looking at the works that the writers of the New Testament pointed to in their disciples when they recognized that true faith was being held and practiced by those to whom they had given the Gospel, we have an idea of the nature of the faith that the New Testament is talking about. By looking at the kind of works that were expected from those who not only confessed with their mouth, but truly believed in their heart the message of the Gospel, we can learn something about the kind of faith the New Testament is concerned with in contrast to the kind of faith that the world is forever seeking.

The faith of the world, when they seek to become "spiritual", leads people to be increasingly centered on themselves, often in the mistaken belief that in focusing on themselves they are actually focusing on God, as they assume based on the eternal false teachings that man has followed since the fall of the first Adam, that as all men are created by God, and have the breath of life from God in them, they thus extend that idea to the erroneous conclusion man himself is as God, only lacking the knowledge of how to unleash man's erroneously assumed godlike potential.

We should note that, despite all the external manifestations that we associate with those who have or are filled with "faith", Paul yet addresses, as he calls them, the "carnal" members of the congregation in Corinth, who certainly of all of the churches addressed in the writings of the New Testament, were apparently focused no less than any other fellowship on the gifts of the Spirit. Paul in writing to the Corinthians makes the observation that if agape love and forgiveness are not being evidenced in the behavior of the members of the community of faith to themselves and each other, as a result of the faith we say we have, the rest of what we manifest in our behavior, the speaking in tongues, the attempts to emulate the other gifts such as prophecy, it amounts to nothing.

The fruit of the spirit is love, joy and peace in the Holy Spirit as we receive the inner witness from the Holy Spirit of the truth of the message of the Gospel

(Eph. 1:13); that God was in Christ, not counting our sins against us, but made Him, Jesus, who knew no sin, to be sin on our behalf, that we might cease to seek to build on the foundation of our fallen nature, but leave it by faith crucified with Christ on His cross, and abide by faith complete in the risen Christ, Jesus, who is now seated at the right hand of God.

And to this end are the gifts of the spirit manifested in the church, to seek to confirm the message of the Gospel, that Jesus is the way, truth and life, and that we have every reason to pick up our cross, and follow Christ, to be found in Him, not having a righteousness of our own which is by the works of the law, but instead being baptized into His death and life, we now leave our old life dead under the waters of testimony, and now seek to cast down every thought that would reveal us as anything but clothed in Christ, that in the body of Christ the members would no longer be measuring themselves by themselves with their minds and focus on the external flesh based on the old nature, but instead, the body of Christ, building itself up in the love of God in Christ, is to see themselves and each other complete in Christ, all clothed and receiving the same reward, that of the heavenly treasure of Christ Himself, that in the body of Christ there is no more distinction to be made according to the worlds standards of merit, that in Christ, there is now neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, but Christ is all and in all (Galatians 3:28; Colossians 3:11).

In the Lord's prayer, we are told to forgive those as we have been forgiven by the Lord, and we are reminded of the parable of those who are forgiven much who then love much, and that those who feel they have been forgiven little, love little. We are called to faith in Christ not as an aid to help us in our struggles to repair or supplement our fallen temporal natures, but in effect, to exchange this old life, to let it go, for the new life offered in Christ.

It is only when we realize the true depth of worthlessness of the foundation of our fallen nature that will always seek to sustain itself apart from the union of God from which the first Adam willingly separated himself, and instead continue

to seek to build with wood, hay and stubble, on a foundation that Jesus described as but sand waiting for the wind and waves to wash it away. It is only when we come to the end of our hope and dependence on ourselves, and truly place all on the only foundation that can be laid, that of the foundation of Christ Himself, that we begin as born again new creations, starting over in who we are in Him and building ourselves up, abiding in Christ Himself for who and what we are, and on behalf of what we seek to do on His behalf.

The integrity of the fellowship of those in the household of faith, depends upon our reinforcing in psalms, hymns and gifts of the Holy Spirit, bestowed as He wills, those things that are beneficial for the building up the body of Christ in the love of God who so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, till all attain to the full stature of what it means to be in Christ, a member of His body.

Fellowship in the body of Christ is not based on being boastful or proud, and running to and fro after the latest teachings on how to make ourselves more self sufficient or powerful through operation of spiritual techniques or teachings, it is rather about being centered in Christ, built on the foundation of who He is, for no other foundation can be laid Paul tells us, but that of Christ, and the fruits and gifts of the spirit are the result, to the extent that we can achieve that point of relationship with God through Christ, when as Paul says, we have left all that we might have once trusted behind us, the good and the bad, and we then come to that place where we can receive and thus trust in the upward call of God in Christ.

Therefore, the works of true faith in Christ, are love and forgiveness, for if we truly believe we are in Christ, and we have truly come to the end of ourselves, so that there is no more boastful pride of life, there is no more arrogance, no more attempting to build our self esteem on behalf of the diminished status of others, there is then no more seeking after the praise and approval of men, for in Christ we are complete, in Him all the fullness of the deity dwells in bodily form, and in Him we are made complete.

Paul reminds the carnal Corinthians that all things are ours, those of us who confess and believe in Christ and the work He has finished on our behalf. In our faith communities there should no longer be striving to see who is the best according to the current standards of what works one must do to merit praise, no more trying to see who is better than another, not more measuring ourselves by ourselves, but instead all should be seeking the unity of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus in the bond of the peace that comes from resting and abiding in Christ, that all might rise to the stature of who they are by faith in Christ, a stature that is not dependant on upon our circumstances and whether or not in this temporal realm one has achieved great possessions or won the praise of men.

Indeed the Bible tells us that those things that are highly esteemed among men, are actually despised by God. The Bible also warns us that we should be careful when men speak well of us, for so they spoke of the false prophets. Our confidence, and our ability to stand fast and unmovable in our heart, soul and mind in all circumstances, and to be content and at rest regardless of our temporal circumstances, comes through our abiding in Christ, for Jesus said "unless you abide in Me, you can do nothing".

John 15:4-5

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.

Martha was upset that Mary was not neurotically or compulsively motivated to seek to maintain her self esteem by seeking to be the ultimate servant to Jesus and his disciples. But Mary was staying at the feet of Jesus, drinking in every word that was sprit and life. When the seed of the gospel takes root in the heart, out of that come the issues of life. Jesus said that Mary had chosen the right thing at that time. Works performed as payment to earn favor from God will never equal those works done as a response from those who have received the knowledge of the

grace of God in their hearts. The works done not as payment for favor, but as a response to God's favor shown to fallen man in Christ, will always exceed the capabilities of those who labor in their own strength, for those in Christ, do all things through Christ who strengthens them.

Luke 10:38-42

Now it happened as they went that He entered a certain village; and a certain woman named Martha welcomed Him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus' feet and heard His word. But Martha was distracted with much serving, and she approached Him and said, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me."

And Jesus answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her."

True Christian faith then results in the works of a redeemed character. James points out that while we may profess we have faith, if we still show the carnal workings of the temporal mind focused on building itself on the things of this world, measuring ourselves by ourselves, the boastful pride of life, that these works if they are in our lives actually testify against our testimony that we really believe in our heart what we are confessing with our mouth.

For indeed, how can we have the confidence that God will confirm the word of His grace with signs and wonders following if we do not ourselves believe it to the extent to which we are standing firm on Christ as our foundation with our eyes fixed on Christ. Our gaze is to be placed on Christ, the internal eternal revelation confirmed by the spirit with which we were sealed when we believed, not the external temporal realm of our flesh. For this temporal tent, this jar of clay for the believer now contains the treasure of the light of the knowledge of the Glory of God in the face of Christ, revealed to us by the Holy Spirit.

Our eyes must come off ourselves, and be fixed on Christ. Any influence that seeks therefore to rise above the knowledge of Christ will be attempting to lead our gaze away from the revelation of Christ and faith in His finished work in restoring us to union with the Father, and instead, we be seeking to draw our gaze back on the external, and once we are again attempting to build as transgressors on that which we were by faith to leave destroyed on the cross of Christ, the cares and worries of this world which will choke the word from being planted deeply enough in our hearts to bear the fruit of true repentance in the Gospel of Christ, that repentance from dead works, that alone which can issue out of the heart of man with the issues of life, that never ending stream of water that Jesus promised the Samaritan women at the well should she receive the words of spirit and life that He spoke to her.

Truly in the wilderness there is nothing to support us except our faith and belief. And when our motives, and our own personal agendas have been set aside, it is then that we see clearly the truth in which we believe.

The carnal mind is focused on the things of the flesh, the things of this world. It is seeking its satisfaction, the things that we can see, hear, taste and touch in this world. And yet Jesus, throughout His ministry and in what He taught, demonstrated that those in the faith of the Gospel are oriented not to the circumstances of this life, but to the eternal things, it is there their treasure is to be, that their heart may be fixed on the eternal things, and not the cares and concerns of this world system.

To the extent we lose that focus on Christ, and when influences come into the church that cause Christ to no longer be lifted up that all men might be drawn to Him, and to the extent that religion becomes simply a utilitarian and pragmatic means to an end, according to the normal carnal pursuits of fallen man, we then become no different, as Jesus taught, than the non-believers who are seeking only what they can buy, sell or consume.

Clearly there is a distinction made between that orientation and that which seeks the kingdom of God. For Jesus said we were to seek first the kingdom of God, then would all those things the gentiles seek, that God knows we have daily need as long as we continue to inhabit this temporal tent, this earthen clay vessel.

It is when the orientation to the unseen eternal things is jeopardized, by those infiltrating a New Testament fellowship of faith with a value system that competes with the treasures of eternity, and shifts the focus back to the mundane cares and concerns of this life, that the individuals ability to identify and see themselves complete in Christ, and to abide in Him as their very life, will become compromised, and the worries and concerns of everyday existence will eventually choke the seed of the Gospel from bearing fruit.

It is undoubtedly for this reason that we see the Holy Spirit taking such exception to the efforts of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5). They sought to ingratiate themselves into the fellowship of the early New Testament Church, on the bases of what they had done with their wealth, all the while, in their hearts obviously valuing that wealth above their profession of faith in the completeness of Christ. True faith in Christ had resulted in the early church having all things being equally shared with each member as they no longer related to each other outside of their personal and corporate inclusion by faith in the very body of Christ Himself.

When we follow teachings that appeal to our itching ears, it is always on behalf of those things that appeal to our carnal nature and its desire to become rich and in need of nothing and to rest content in the things of this world.

False teachings, teachings of another Jesus, a Gospel that is not really good news, will be introduced by the wolves who are seeking to lead people by their own covetousness and carnality. Many will follow the false teachers seeking after the enticing rewards promised by the wolves.

False doctrine, therefore, is not only academically and doctrinally a problem for New Testament Christian faith, but experientially in the life of a believer it leads soul, mind and spirit to an orientation away from being focused on Christ for all that we are and on whom all as a foundation is to rest.

The effect of those who begin to exemplify in their lives those teachings not based on Christ and who then influence by their behavior the rest of the body of believers, introduces a great weakness to the church. We can see the seriousness of this issue in the stand that Paul took when in the presence of the congregation, where he publically denounced the behavior of Peter who was being influenced by legalistic sects that were seeking to reintroduce their old religious mindset, and practices of man being defined by works rather than faith in Christ.

Galatians 2:11-13

Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed; for before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision. And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy.

There is religious bondage, and there is also the bondage about which Jesus and the New Testament writers taught, that bondage of once again allowing ourselves to become debtors to the flesh. And tendencies that draw us back into these kinds of orientations toward God, ourselves and each other, lead us away from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ, and the freedom that believers are to enjoy in Him. Other concerns seek to rise above the knowledge of Christ and draw attention away from Christ.

The Fellowship of Faith

In his letters 2 Timothy, and Titus, we see where Paul admonishes his audience with a word of rebuke to have nothing to do with the foolish and false teachings, and even the teachers themselves, those who mix truth with error, those who spread foolish and false teachings.

There are many well meaning people who nevertheless may not be the best company to keep if one is concerned with the unity of the body of Christ being based on who the members are in Him. The following points may be made concerning the influence of those who may be sincere, yet under the influence of false doctrine concerning true New Testament faith in Christ.

- A. They do not currently have the ability to read or understand the Bible, they have spent their time listening to too many false teachers who have, as the Bible says, ruined their ability to hear and so they no longer have ears that can hear the pure word of God.
- B. Without the word of God, the "sword of the Spirit" we cannot, as the Bible says, "divide between soul and spirit, bone and flesh". Therefore, they do not know the difference between their own thoughts and ideas, and those that might actually come from God. But they are certain they do, and that makes the situation dangerous as there is no real spiritual discernment.
- C. Because there is no knowledge of the heart of the Gospel or its application, there are people who live a carnal life style, and exemplify covetousness which the Bible says is idolatry, as it makes an idol out of material things. There is confusion as a lifestyle centered on things other than Christ is presented as if being rich and in need of nothing is the goal and success of all who correctly "operate" faith. This always results in a loss of focus on Christ, and instead focuses the attention on self.
- D. Thus, the people are unaware themselves of what they are doing and why, and influence others to follow the influence of false teachers and portray in their lives an example of supposedly successful Christian faith when in reality it is in

many ways the opposite of true Christianity. And so others are lead away from the true faith by their example and influence.

A loss of focus on Christ results in a weakened and compromised Christian faith. Indeed James makes the point that a fellowship that regards those rich in the things of this world as deserving of more honor than those of the household of faith who may lack in the area of material possessions demonstrates a lack of true Christian faith, the evidence of measuring each other by the external standards of society give testimony that there is no corresponding fruit from those professing faith in Christ.

James 2:1-5

My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality. For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes, and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, "You sit here in a good place," and say to the poor man, "You stand there," or, "Sit here at my footstool," have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?

Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?

1 Corinthians 5:11

But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner — not even to eat with such a person.

Jude 1:12-13

These are spots in your love feasts, while they feast with you without fear, serving only themselves. They are clouds without water, carried about by the winds; late autumn trees without fruit, twice dead, pulled up by the roots; raging waves of the sea, foaming up their own shame; wandering stars for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever.

It is a serious matter when those in leadership abandon the true faith of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and turn instead to teachings that seek to demonstrate that Godliness is merely a means of great gain in the pursuit of material things of this life. Being covetous is considered idolatry, because it makes an idol out of possessions.

Titus 1:7

For a bishop must be blameless, as a steward of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money

Acts 20:28-30

Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.

Isaiah 56:11

Yes, they are greedy dogs Which never have enough. And they are shepherds Who cannot understand; They all look to their own way, Every one for his own gain, From his own territory.

Ezekiel 34:18-19

Is it too little for you to have eaten up the good pasture, that you must tread down with your feet the residue of your pasture — and to have drunk of the clear waters, that you must foul the residue with your feet? And as for My flock, they eat what you have trampled with your feet, and they drink what you have fouled with your feet.”

When the pure message of the Gospel is corrupted and turned into just another technique to win God's favor or to operate faith, the real goal becomes the loaves and the fishes, the things the gentiles seek, and reinforced in that is the message that our goal is to seek satisfaction in the circumstances and possessions of this temporal life. This will choke the ability of the Gospel to take root deep in the heart and produce the fruit of the spirit that will last to eternity.

Matthew 13:18-23

“Therefore hear the parable of the sower: When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, then the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the wayside. But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles. 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. But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.”

Matthew 6:19-33

“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

“The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!

“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.

Faith on Earth

Christianity is often criticized by those who say it is too exclusive of other belief systems by its insistence that Jesus is the only way to the Father, the Creator of all that is. They are certainly correct in that distinction of the uniqueness of Christianity amongst the world's religions and belief systems. Christian faith is the only religion known to man where God seeks His lost creation and provides a way in Himself for man to be saved from the spiritual death chosen by man at his willful separation from union with God.

All other religions assume that if man discovers the knowledge of what to do for his spiritual condition and what works are required to defer the wrath of God or gods, that man will achieve the reward of eternal life, favor with God, and/or even his own god-hood whereby he would no longer need to depend on the favor of a superior god, for he would then be able to eternally sustain himself.

It is not just the definition of faith that needs to be qualified according to the New Testament consensus. Eternal life is not a reward for good works. It is a condition that is either inherent or lacking in our nature inherited from the first fallen Adam. If by nature we are born children of wrath, at enmity with God, our condition excludes union with the source and foundation of life, God Himself. We must reestablish our connection and acceptance by Him in whom we once and even now must live and move and have our being.

Unfortunately, our own modern age, no doubt in a hurry to exempt itself from past ties to any authority but its own due to the opportunities now offered for finding satisfaction in the offerings of sensory stimulus and pleasure unknown to even the most privileged and wealthy of previous ages (would Solomon had need of so many wives if there was ice-cream available at the local mini-mart?), has led man to abandon any knowledge or awareness of morals, laws, or divine presence beyond that of man himself.

In our modern society, as evidenced by the commercial religious media, the popular titles in even religious book stores, people are not seeking the faith to believe or trust in a higher power, but rather, to become themselves a higher power. Such inclinations may indeed be but the natural tendency inherited from that chosen by man's first father Adam when he believed the lie of the serpent to relinquish his dependence on God for eternal life, and instead sought to sustain himself by seeking the knowledge of how he himself could learn to operate as God.

Our modern industrial and technological society has virtually provided an army of slaves that are at the beck and call of even the least advantaged among us. We push a button, there is heat. We push a button, there is light. We have but a dollar, no fortune to be sure, yet we do not starve, we can still buy a happy meal, and then struggle not with the effects of famine, but with being full but malnourished, overweight and obese.

The information on which we base our decisions concerning religious, political and social conduct no longer, as was the case in times past, comes from the market place or gate of the city, or the accumulated wisdom of the past, but instead today comes from thousands of points of commercially funded and motivated infomercials. There is little objective news, so much is now just political commentary and the spinning of information in support of an agenda. We seek less the information to think, and instead are settling for being told what to think by the groups in which we wish to be identified.

We no longer converse with our fellow man on the street seeking to expand our awareness and ideas, as iron sharpens iron, as we can now choose to fill our ears with whatever sounds or messages of truth that pleases us. In this, perhaps, we err most, for in having access to any and all things, we choose that which accommodates those appetites and inclinations that require the least effort to develop. Few there now are, therefore, who truly hunger and thirst for the righteousness of God or seek to expand their understanding of Him.

Few there are who walk a road at night and look in wonder at the heavens declaring the glory of God, the streets are empty, the houses dark but for the pulsating green glow of computer and television displays.

And should knowledge, some spoken word or impulse from the spirit seek to nudge us toward the divine, it is all too easily drowned out and smothered by the cacophony of noise dispensed into the highways and byways of cultural media, by those seeking to draw our attention exclusively to the concerns of everyday existence, and the solutions they offer to convince us that in their products we have all that is needed for satisfaction and contentment in this life.

There is a popular saying, that it is better to rule in Hell than to serve in Heaven, yet for those who truly come to the end of themselves, as the prodigal son, who realize that even the servants in heaven are able to partake of the heavenly food of which men do not know in time of famine for the word of God, the words that are spirit, and life, they might also remember that there are no atheists in foxholes.

Yet such a realization rarely comes when our life styles are comfortable and seem to be in order, when we have the circumstantial convenience and opportunity to manage ourselves and when we seem successful in our place of temporal security, and think that we are rich and in need of nothing.

Luke 18:7-8

And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?"

Christian Faith

For faith to be considered Christian it must be in Christ. All religions essentially claim to have received or perceived, through divine insight or revelation, instructions from God, and what man must do in order to move from point A to point B. Unique amongst all of them is the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and the work of revelation of God, of His holiness, and man's fallen condition, and the remedy that God Himself, by His own arm, supplied. Not because man earned or deserved it, but because God so loved the world, seeking that which was lost.

When we begin to speak of faith as simply a process or a certain learned technique of seeking or acquiring supernatural influence or power in our lives, it is no longer Christian faith, it is simply generic spirituality.

Psalm 61:2

From the end of the earth I will cry to You, When my heart is overwhelmed; Lead me to the rock that is higher than I.

Paul said he could do all things through Christ who strengthened him. He did not mean that he was bullet proof or impervious to the effects of being scourged, stoned or thrown in prison, what he meant was that he did not live on behalf of those circumstances, his faith was not an exercise in self preservation of who he was in the temporal clay vessel of his flesh, but rather it was a goal and an orientation that allowed him to walk through this life not influenced by his circumstances, but on the hope of the gospel.

This is why we find Paul and his companion Silas signing in the Philippian prison. They were not singing because they were in prison, or because they were not in prison, but because of the truth of the Gospel in which their faith was focused, and their heart was set on the treasures which they trusted were reserved and kept safe for them, beyond the threat of rust, moth or thief, in Christ.

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.

When the disciples asked Jesus to help them increase in faith, His response was that faith was not something to be measured, that one either had faith or one did not. We believe in God, Jesus said, and so we must believe in Him. In this world we may indeed have many trials and tribulations, but we are to be of good cheer, because of our faith in Christ, who has overcome this world, and we are to rest believing we are complete in Him, letting go of our dependence on the foundation of sand on which we once attempted to build who we are, that foundation inherited from the first Adam, that old foundation which in Christian faith is left by faith crucified with Christ on the cross.

While the crowds followed Jesus, hoping to see a miracle, believing He was indeed a prophet, a miracle worker, yet there were only certain ones who received healings, and to those Jesus said "your faith has made you well, go in peace".

One would have thought with our contemporary mindset that Jesus then, would be teaching people how to have faith, that he would offer techniques on how to exercise and operate faith, develop ten step programs for exercising and growing faith. Such teachings make up the bulk of what is currently offered on contemporary religious programming, a multi-million dollar industry fed by those seeking supernatural power and divine provision to overcome their temporal circumstances.

And yet, when the disciples of Jesus asked Him to show them how to increase their faith, He told them that faith was not something to be measured, that if one had faith as a mustard seed it would be sufficient. What then, was the faith that Jesus spoke of? Because obviously the normal way we think about faith that has always been the religious tendency of mankind's fallen Adamic mindset, fails

to anticipate the distinction between true Christian faith as taught by Jesus, and that common understanding of faith which is essentially the attempt of man to exercise control of himself and his environment through spiritual will or power.

It was not the belief that one could miraculously be healed that released the power of God through Jesus, it was belief that Jesus was and is the resurrection and the life, no one comes to the Father but by Him. The object of our faith to be Christ Himself, not simply the results we expect to see from our own exercise or operation of faith.

John 8:24

Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins.”

John 10:25

Jesus answered them, “I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in My Father’s name, they bear witness of Me.

John 10:37-38

If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; but if I do, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, that you may know and believe that the Father is in Me, and I in Him.”

John 14:11

Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me, or else believe Me for the sake of the works themselves.

The true understanding of Jesus, and having our faith In Him, and because of that faith in Christ, knowing that clothed in His righteousness our prayers are heard by our Father in Heaven, and being confident that in our standing before God by virtue not of our own works or righteousness, but of who we are in Christ, is a far different matter than simply trying to master a technique to work miracles, for that

is essentially merely the attempt to exercise magic, and all the tokens that we use, all the rituals, and all the offerings that we might make to acquire that power, fail to appreciate and understand the distinction the Gospel makes between saving faith in Christ — what it means to be born again in Him, and one who is merely seeking religious or spiritual power, on behalf of advancing something that God never intended fallen man to perfect or improve on, but to instead leave by faith on the cross crucified with His Son, that we might find ourselves totally born again and new, being built up on the foundation of Christ Himself, rather than who we once were, as descendants of the first fallen Adam.

Saving Faith

After His resurrection, Jesus appeared to some of His disciples on the road, and entered into conversation with them, while they had as yet not recognized who He was, and they said, they were dismayed over the death of Jesus, that Jesus had surely been a great prophet, and that they have even had hopes that He would be the Messiah, the one who would lead Israel out of the physical bondage and subjection to the authority of the Roman Empire. To His own disciples Jesus then began to teach from the scriptures and show that the Messiah was first to suffer for the sins of fallen mankind.

The true role of the Messiah was entirely different then what people with a political, practical or temporal mindset were anticipating. Indeed, while able to draw large crowds by multiplying loaves and fishes, when Jesus began to then teach the heart of the faith of those who would be saved by the Gospel, that those who would eat His flesh and drink His blood, those who left dependence on who they were and placed all that they would then become on the foundation of Jesus Himself, the words of the Gospel that were spirit and life, many of His own disciples found this difficult, and many ceased to continue to follow Him. It is that mindset, that understanding, that true distinction of what the Christian faith is, that we must come to, to avoid being swept away by every wind and wave of doctrine that presents itself as satisfaction to the itching ears to the carnal and temporal nature of the Adamic mindset.

As Jesus was heading towards the tomb of His friend Lazarus, He was not instructing Mary on How to believe that dead people could be resurrected, but rather He was telling her that He was the resurrection and the life, her faith was to be in Him and who He is. It is faith in Christ that is the bases of true Christian faith, we are to fix our eyes on Jesus the author, perfecter and finisher of our faith, seeing ourselves not according to the temporal in need of somehow to overcome our inherited fallen nature, to somehow change the earthen clay vessel we now temporally inhabit, but rather to see ourselves and each other in the body of Christ by faith clothed in Christ Himself, seated with Christ at the right hand of the

Father. Paul came to this mindset, and understood it as the bases of his strength to carry on the work on God in the strength and support that God supplied.

2 Corinthians 12:7-10

And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. 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. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

When Paul consciously knew of his own inherent weakness, then God's spiritual power could be perfected. It is never on behalf of our own ability or strength, but always and only to the degree that we can totally rely on who Jesus is, far above all principality and power, and when we learn to rely on His strength, and do things in His name, and have the faith that comes through His name, there then is the true power, in the spirit, of the Gospel demonstrated.

True spiritual power in Christ, that power that enables us to do all things through Christ, only comes when the message of the cross is firmly in place and we understand that Christian faith is not a matter of trying to strengthen and save ourselves in order to find ourselves or reach some innate hidden spiritual potential, rather it is in losing ourselves, letting go of all that we might have been or achieved on our own, and finding ourselves born again, starting over completely in who we are and what we are in Christ.

The Rest of Faith

The Bible speaks of fearing lest we fail to enter the state of resting in the completed work of Jesus that He spoke of when He said that unless we abide in Him, we could do nothing of lasting value in the eternal kingdom of God. Our treasures are not to be what we can hold in our hands or store in our barns. Our heart is to be set on the treasure of who we are in Christ, our treasure is to be in heaven and our hearts are to be set on the things that are eternal, on the things that are unseen, not the things that are seen.

2 Corinthians 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.

Too often in those circles that seek faith as a means to advance their own potential, there is resistance to the Biblical Jesus, His position, power and prominence above all things. Instead He gets reduced to being merely a component, companion, or simply a counselor on how we might maximize and increase our own inherent and latent potential, if only we might come to the knowledge of how to do so.

We keep habitually thinking along the lines of our fallen forefather, the first Adam, who ceased to be in union with God when Adam aligned his thinking according to the lie of the serpent. It is an odd paradox, the human race continues generation after generation to be born in a fallen, mortal body, and uses that as the foundation for who and what they are. Man's mortal body is sustained and dependent on a fallen creation. Since the death of the first Adam, all of his

descendents have died, yet man by nature continues to think that all that is currently lacking is the right instructions on what work man is to perform in order to climb out of his mortal state and into an eternal one. Jacob saw such a ladder. Yet in his struggle with one of the angels that he saw ascending that ladder, he ended up with a reminder of his very human and fallen condition, as at the end of Jacobs struggle with the angel, he was rendered lame.

A good test then on the value of a given teaching on faith is to ask: is the teaching taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ? Or has Christ been set aside, and instead, has something else, some ideology based on an assumed potential in man, or devotion to some human personality, come into focus?

Our current culture now equates popularity with the honor once only given to true heroes. And to those who do not fully understand the message of the Gospel, those who appear popular based on their reputed success in achieving greatness by the application of spiritual principles, are often revered and devoutly followed. Once such a following is gathered, it then produces a dynamic that continues to draw interest and followers simply because of the number of people who are already following. Today, to be famous, one must only achieve the position of being well known. Historian and social theorist Daniel J. Boorstin defined a celebrity as "a person who is known for his well-knownness".

Great crowds followed Jesus during His Earthy ministry, and most who followed Him no doubt did so because Jesus was the hot topic of the day, the prophet one must see, the current prophet of the hour. But we see in the Gospel accounts that only those who sought him under certain conditions and expectations actually experienced the miracles that all we seeking to receive.

“Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” cried the blind man. The crowds tried to hush the blind man, they were following the miracle worker and this man, obviously a sinner who they probably assumed had been justly stricken with his

infirmity by God, had no business interrupting the teacher. But the blind man was recognizing and responding to Jesus as the Messiah. The blind man was not fixed on the miracle he was seeking; his attention was fixed on Jesus. Jesus granted the blind man's wish to receive his sight, and said, "Your faith has made you well." The blind man's faith was not in the miracle to have his sight restored, his faith was in the person of Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of David, through which he sought not only the gift of sight, but of mercy as well.

Even to His innermost circle of disciples Jesus would finally have to ask the question, "Who do men say that I am?" It is on that foundation, and on that understanding and faith in Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God, on which the church, His body, is to be built. It is not the belief that a man can become as God if he only applies himself and learns how to be spiritual or religious.

The law given through Moses included the stipulation that without the shedding of blood, that of a lamb without blemish, there would be no remission of sin. By the works of the law alone, no flesh would be justified.

Romans 3:19-20

Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

Man did not receive the law so that he could learn how to make God a debtor to man once man paid God off with appropriate or worthy works, nor did it present a path for man to achieve his own ascension to god-hood. God presented The Holy law to bring about the knowledge of man's inherited sin nature, that man would then voluntarily out of humility for his revelation of his sinful and fallen nature before the Creator, turn from darkness, and allow himself to be exposed without his fig leaves, the filthy rags of our own self made righteousness, and

instead through faith in Christ receive the clothing of righteousness that God lovingly provided to save His fallen creation - His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ.

Corinthians 5:21

For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

When the disciples of Jesus had been unable to heal a boy beset by convulsions, Jesus asked them "how long must I be with you?" Until they recognized Him and who He was, they could not operate in His authority and His power. Instead, despite hearing the good news of the Gospel, our natural tendency will always be to get our attention and focus back on ourselves, and become preoccupied with how spiritual we can be.

Self righteousness before the power of the Devil will always fail, for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified, and there is none righteous, no not one. The only way the gates of Hades will not prevail against those seeking the kingdom of God, is if instead of trying to open those doors by our own effort, we instead switch our foundation from that of the fallen carnal one inherited from the fallen first Adam, and by faith leaving it crucified with Christ on the cross. By faith we are to turn our eyes from ourselves, instead see ourselves in Him, accepting and resting in His completed work.

The work of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer, and through members of the body of Christ, is primarily to give a revelation of the depth of God's love for us in God's offering us His only begotten Son, and what the wealth of the inheritance is in the saints who trust in Christ, who have become joint heirs with Christ, seated with Him at the right hand of God the Father.

Ephesians 3:14-19

For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height — to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

The Foundation of Faith

The foundation of the church that Jesus intended was to be built on the confession and belief in Jesus Himself as the Messiah, as the Son of God. When anything or anyone else (even ourselves) becomes the primary concern or focus within the Christian community, the spiritual and social dynamic of the body of Christ will lose its integrity and cohesion. When Jesus is lifted up, all men are drawn to Him. When anything else is lifted up, men are inevitably drawn back into themselves and concerns for their temporal state.

Matthew 16:13-19

When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?"

So they said, "Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"

Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.

And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

When Jesus is the focus of our faith, when He is the all and in all, when He is the way, truth and the life, our relationships change because the foundation on which we stand has changed. Those receiving God's forgiveness and Grace must discontinue orienting their relationships based on their own merits and the opinions of others. When we are born again in Christ, all things are to become new.

But when Christ is no longer the focus and foundation of the church, this then creates an environment of competitiveness, where each member becomes concerned with their own status based on popularity, possessions or works, and with how well they have performed compared to each other.

Christian fellowship can thus degenerate into a carnal environment where each member is no longer seeking the stature of Christ steadfast on the foundation of His finished work, but instead is focused on measuring themselves by themselves. Legalism, and critical judgmental attitudes come about when the focus is on how far the individual has progressed in perfecting themselves, rather than focused on the finished work of Christ, and our being clothed with His righteousness, each a member of the body of Christ, equally accepted in the Beloved Son of God.

1 Corinthians 3:1-3

And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?

To the extent that the body of Christ operates on the bases of the Grace and forgiveness of God, and seeks not to earn salvation, but instead rests in the finished work of Jesus Christ and sees each member of His body, the church, equally clothed with His righteousness, that is the enabling condition for the true power of the cross, and of the new birth. We cannot leave dependence on ourselves if we are the focus and foundation of who and what we are, we can only do that when our focus and faith is on Christ Himself, and we seek to leave as worthless any other foundation.

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.

Galatians 6: 14-15

But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation.

The mind set on the flesh is death, because when our flesh is the foundation for who and what we are, it is our master, for we are dependent on ourselves. How hard then it is to deny ourselves when we are a debtor to our flesh. If the flesh is fulfilled, we then seek to rest in that fulfillment. The spirit rests on the soul which rests on the flesh. Some religions teach harsh treatment of the body, denying foods or comfort, yet the focus is still on what the flesh has done or not done, and in the end it only produces a carnal spirituality based on ones works.

Romans 8:5

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.

We are not to seek to struggle with our flesh, for that only keeps it our primary focus. Instead our attention is to be on who we are in Christ, no longer using the eternal standards of the world system and the opinions of men to define us. The weaker we know ourselves to be in ourselves, the greater the opportunity to rely on and realize the strength that God supplies in His Son.

2 Corinthians 12:10

Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

To operate in the authority of Jesus Christ, the body of Christ must abide in Him and mutually support itself in Him, or it can do nothing. In this is the church's true strength, and its greatest point of vulnerability.

2 Corinthians 11:3-4

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. For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted — you may well put up with it!

Colossians 2:4-10

Now this I say lest anyone should deceive you with persuasive words. For though I am absent in the flesh, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ.

As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.

Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.

John 15:1-8

“I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. 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.

John 3:13-17

No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. 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.

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