

# Faith and Works LXVII

The Contemporary and Biblical Contexts

Col. 2:8

# Listening

# Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Truth That is Truth</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Hearing Truth</b>	<b>6</b>
<i>Luke 10:38-42</i>	6
<i>Matthew 6:31-33</i>	7
<i>John 6:41-42</i>	7
<i>John 6:28-29</i>	7
<i>1 Corinthians 2:9</i>	8
<i>1 Peter 1:10-12</i>	8
<b>Experiencing The Holy Spirit</b>	<b>9</b>
<i>2 Peter 1:19-21</i>	9
<i>2 Corinthians 4:3-6</i>	9
<i>John 15:26</i>	9
<i>Revelation 19:10</i>	10
<i>Isaiah 55:9</i>	10
<b>Having a Heart for Knowledge</b>	<b>11</b>
<i>Luke 12:4-5</i>	12
<i>Romans 8:32-39</i>	12
<i>2 Corinthians 5:7-9</i>	12
<i>Matthew 6:5-14</i>	13
<i>Deuteronomy 5:25-29</i>	14
<i>Mark 12:30</i>	15
<i>Jeremiah 17:9</i>	15
<i>Romans 3:19-20</i>	15
<i>Hebrews 9:22</i>	15
<i>1 Corinthians 3:11-15</i>	16
<i>Matthew 17:1-5</i>	16
<i>Luke 9:28-35</i>	17
<i>2 Peter 1:16-18</i>	17
<b>Learning the Truth of the Truth</b>	<b>18</b>
<i>John 12:20-25</i>	18
<i>1 Corinthians 1:18-31</i>	18
<i>2 Corinthians 4:3-6</i>	20
<i>Colossians 2:8-10</i>	20
<i>2 Corinthians 5:16-21</i>	20

## **Introduction**

Contrary to the belief of our post-modern age, there has been, and always will be truths that are known and which we sometimes classify as "common sense". To make common sense uncommon seems to be the intent of this generation. Not because they have become too smart to be fooled by non-truth, but because even before they engage their minds, they are reacting to truth following a pattern of behavior taught by a generation that has declared that all truth is relative, that every man or woman should do that which seems right in their own eyes.

It is odd that this movement should be taking place at a time where advances in science and technology have enabled a standard of living and experience that has never before been seen in the history of man. Engineering, medical science, mapping the genetic code, computers, all these advanced fields require the building on a stable foundation of knowledge. Indeed, we seem to live in the days that the prophet Daniel foresaw when he wrote that in the last days "many shall rush to and fro, and knowledge shall increase". It would seem then, that rather than knowledge, modern man is denying there can be wisdom as well.

The television series "Seinfeld" was nothing but a celebration of how truth was defined by whatever arbitrary context it found itself.

## **Truth That is Truth**

Christians hold certain truths to be self evident, and unchanging regardless of the given context. And by whatever name in whatever language we choose to call a rose, it is still a rose. It is the Gnostic influence of the mind sciences that have permeated our culture that encourage people to think that the rose only exists because we choose to name it.

There was a time that certain truths were kept out of the reach and influence of the given cultures influence. Such were the truths cited in the American Constitution were it states "endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights", rights that cannot be set aside or changed by decree of finite man.

Once truth no longer defines the context of a given situation, but the context is now allowed to define truth, even the presupposition that human life is valuable and worthy of respect will no longer remain, but will be swept away as soon as the value of man is evaluated within its utilitarian worth within a given social context.

There is tremendous inhumanity imminent in the modern societies of mankind due to the loss of the once unquestioned and "unalienable" value and dignity of human life. In our modern thinking, God is no longer the Creator of all that is, but creation itself is now where god is found, and as such, there is no longer divine truth or revelation, there is only the dialectic of truth as it is derived from the given context of materialism and the individual experience and perception of spirituality.

One can find a couple of scriptures that will fit into the context of today's popular teachings and manmade notions of spirituality, but few, if any of those teachings can be found within the context of scripture.

## Hearing Truth

### **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."*

We need, like Mary, the sister of Martha, to sit at the feet of Jesus, and simply listen. The Creator of man and the universe has some history to teach us, some things to be learned from the accounts of people's lives, He has some things concerning our future that we need to know and be watching for, and He has the testimony and truth of how the entire narrative is summed up in His only begotten Son, who is the way, truth and the life for all who understand that the narrative of God's revelation in history and through the lives of men and women is the story about the past, present and future of each of us.

When we get the whole picture of what God is revealing to us, it will not be a complicated one, but it will be a complete one.

Where things get complicated is when we take a collection of scriptures from various places in the Bible and put them within the context of somebody else's personal ideas or attempt to use them to meet or answer someone's personal expectations that the Bible is not explicitly addressing. Many sought Jesus for the way loaves and the fishes, and to way to fulfill the desire for the things that the gentiles seek, but Jesus had a different agenda, one that caused many who at first followed Him to turn away.

**Matthew 6:31-33**

*“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.*

**John 6:41-42**

*The Jews then complained about Him, because He said, “I am the bread which came down from heaven.” And they said, “Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How is it then that He says, ‘I have come down from heaven’?”*

The problem is, the Bible contains the answers for the questions the Bible defines, it is not a generic collection of truths that answer every question that a man or women might ask. Often this is because in our natural religious mindset we assume that God will be telling us things we already know or expect to here.

**John 6:28-29**

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

But eye has not seen, nor ear heard what God has prepared. Even the prophets who spoke the things that God was revealing to them did not fully understand what was being communicated until the fullness of time for that truth to be revealed and realized in the future.

### **1 Corinthians 2:9**

*But as it is written: “ Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him.”*

### **1 Peter 1:10-12**

*Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven — things which angels desire to look into.*

## **Experiencing The Holy Spirit**

Another point to be made here, is that the Holy Spirit is confirming the word of Christ, the message and testimony of the Gospel. He is not, as some today teach, giving each individual a special personal experience of their own interpretation of scripture.

If God is not a man that He should lie, then His word is unchanging. If it has no explicit meaning in itself, and means whatever someone interprets it to mean according to their own understanding or experience, then it is meaningless to speak of God's eternal unchanging word.

### **2 Peter 1:19-21**

*And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.*

### **2 Corinthians 4:3-6**

*But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them. For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus' sake. For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*

### **John 15:26**

*“But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me.*

**Revelation 19:10**

*And I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, "See that you do not do that! I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren who have the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."*

What we really need to do therefore, is take our needs, the context of our culture and traditions, take our own understanding and what we think we already know of religion, and see how it fits within the context of scripture. And if it does not fit, we need to sit down again and start listening.

**Isaiah 55:9**

*"For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts."*

## **Having a Heart for Knowledge**

It is harder to unlearn what we think we know in order to learn what we should know, than it is to start fresh, as a child, and just receive from the Lord and hear what He has to say to us.

A very wise man once pointed out that the children of Israel only knew what God was doing, whereas Moses knew why God did what he did. Many times we come to God asking questions of why, because we do not see the big picture that He sees, we do not therefore really see how things fit into the context of eternity, we are always instead trying to take eternal things and fit them into the context of our temporal day-to-day existence.

Often times we are distracted from resting in the eternal treasures and blessings reserved in heaven and the consummation of the hope that is laid up for the believer in Christ for that final day when they stand face to face with Jesus and are then clothed in His likeness, and often we are anxious and consumed with the day to day concerns of this temporal life and seeking somehow to take those eternal treasures in Christ and make them relative to our temporal existence.

And so we really do not understand what Jesus is saying when rather than the day to day things that the gentiles seek, we should first seek His kingdom and His righteousness, seeing ourselves in Him, seated with Him (Col. 3:1-5). After coming to faith in Christ, and never moving from that steadfast position of faith with Christ Himself as the foundation for who and what we are before God, we are to trust God, as in Christ we are now God's very children, members of His household, so that all the things that people seek for their day to day existence will be added unto us by the care and concern of a loving Father. Our temporal situation and context is to be an afterthought after the important issues of eternity have been reconciled in Christ.

**Luke 12:4-5**

*“I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after your body has been killed, has authority to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him.*”

**Romans 8:32-39**

*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, nor 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.*

**2 Corinthians 5:7-9**

*For we walk by faith, not by sight. We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.*

Indeed in the Lord's prayer, He first speaks to us about being established in faith in Him, truly receiving and responding to God's grace by loving and forgiving those around us and even ourselves even as we have received and trusted in the love that God has for us through the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and then in the prayer we are told to pray for our daily needs.

### **Matthew 6:5-14**

*“And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words.*

*“Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him. In this manner, therefore, pray:*

*Our Father in heaven,  
Hallowed be Your name.  
Your kingdom come.  
Your will be done  
On earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our debts,  
As we forgive our debtors.  
And do not lead us into temptation,  
But deliver us from the evil one.  
For Yours is the kingdom and the power  
and the glory forever. Amen.*

*“For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.*

Our security is not to be in the amount of possessions we have laid up for us and stored in our barns, but rather our security is to be in the certainty of who God is and of His disposition toward us, which we can know when we focus on and realize the great love He has shown us in offering us His only begotten Son, that whosoever might believe on Jesus, to be baptized in His name, identified and

clothed with Christ, would therefore not perish, but have eternal life as members of God's kingdom, not as slaves earning a wage, but as actual joint heirs with Christ, members of His household.

The law is not of faith. For when we seek to live by our works, and when we seek to obligate God to act on our behalf in response to the payments we have made through the performance of religious deeds or acts of charity. It is then we are really putting our trust and confidence in ourselves, for we think we can succeed by the works of the law to justify our fallen nature and condition, if we but know what His laws are.

And we see from the very beginning, when the law was given through Moses, that the children of Israel said "all that the LORD our God says to you, and we will hear and do it." They did so out of fear, not really wanting a personal relationship with God. And the problem of course is, that the first and greatest commandment is that we are to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. And we cannot truly love God if we see Him as a fearful participant in a business arraignment, whereby if we meet the requirements of the contract we will be blessed, but if not, we will be cursed.

### **Deuteronomy 5:25-29**

*Now therefore, why should we die? For this great fire will consume us; if we hear the voice of the LORD our God anymore, then we shall die. For who is there of all flesh who has heard the voice of the living God speaking from the midst of the fire, as we have, and lived? You go near and hear all that the LORD our God may say, and tell us all that the LORD our God says to you, and we will hear and do it.'*

*“Then the LORD heard the voice of your words when you spoke to me, and the LORD said to me: ‘I have heard the voice of the words of this people which they have spoken to you. They are right in all that they have spoken. Oh, that they had such a heart in them that they would fear Me and always keep all My commandments, that it might be well with them and with their children forever!’*

**Mark 12:30**

*And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ This is the first commandment.*

**Jeremiah 17:9**

*The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?*

**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.*

**Hebrews 9:22**

*And according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission.*

Instead of trusting God we will be trying to use Him as a means to an end, so that we might acquire the power and control over goods and services for our own continuance in this clay vessel, rather than coming to Him as the end and goal of our desires, and trusting Him as our Father to care for both our eternal and daily temporal needs.

Being a Christian is not just another set of religious routines whereby we can earn or purchase the blessings of eternal life. Being a Christian is abiding and resting in Christ and His finished work, being born again and baptized in His name, His identity, whereby He Himself is the resurrection and the life, He is the way, the truth and the life, and we find our completeness, that state where we are no longer lacking, or in danger of diminishing, but eternally situated in an unchanging and unmovable foundation, in Him.

### **1 Corinthians 3:11-15**

*For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work. If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved — even though only as one escaping through the flames.*

Instead of constantly rushing to and fro, always learning some new spiritual disciple, technique or religious practice or rules we might want to remember what happened to Peter, James and John when one day they went with Jesus to the top of a certain mountain.

### **Matthew 17:1-5**

*Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, led them up on a high mountain by themselves; and He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light. And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him. Then Peter answered and said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, let us make here three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah."*

*While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!”*

### **Luke 9:28-35**

*Now it came to pass, about eight days after these sayings, that He took Peter, John, and James and went up on the mountain to pray. As He prayed, the appearance of His face was altered, and His robe became white and glistening. And behold, two men talked with Him, who were Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of His decease which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. But Peter and those with him were heavy with sleep; and when they were fully awake, they saw His glory and the two men who stood with Him. Then it happened, as they were parting from Him, that Peter said to Jesus, “Master, it is good for us to be here; and let us make three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah” — not knowing what he said.*

*While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were fearful as they entered the cloud. And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, “This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!”*

### **2 Peter 1:16-18**

*For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For He received from God the Father honor and glory when such a voice came to Him from the Excellent Glory: “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” And we heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain.*

## **Learning the Truth of the Truth**

The lesson is clear, Jesus Himself is where our focus should be, not for the purpose of learning from yet another spiritual guru how to become more spiritual, for in fact, Jesus did not teach meditation, yoga, stress management, and was clearly not interested in becoming the leader of a political or social movement. He was proclaiming the kingdom of God, and Himself as the door one had to pass through, the one whose identity we would need to abide in if we wished to be admitted as children of the Creator of the universe who wished for His lost creation to return to Him and call Him "Abba, Father".

Jesus was not, and is not dispensing another brand or versions of man-centered religious truth to the nations, rather, He allowed Himself to be lifted on a cross to taste death for all mankind, and in rising from the dead, He was providing in Himself the way, truth and life for a lost and darkened world in need of the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

### **John 12:20-25**

*Now there were certain Greeks among those who came up to worship at the feast. Then they came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida of Galilee, and asked him, saying, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus."*

*Philip came and told Andrew, and in turn Andrew and Philip told Jesus.*

*But Jesus answered them, saying, "The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified. Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain. He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.*

### **1 Corinthians 1:18-31**

*For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written:*

*“ I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,  
And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.”*

*Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.*

*For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence. But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption — that, as it is written, “He who glories, let him glory in the LORD.”*

## **2 Corinthians 4:3-6**

*But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them. For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus' sake. For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*

## **Colossians 2:8-10**

*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.*

## **2 Corinthians 5:16-21**

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

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

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