

Faith and Works XLI

The Contemporary and Biblical Contexts

Col. 2:8

Help

Often we seek God at those times when we have come to a place where we do not know the way to go, what to do, or how we are to overcome the obstacles before us that impede us in our progress in the direction we were going.

And it is at this point where our attention is filled with the knowledge of the externals and our eyes are on the giants in Canaan, and the Syrian army that surrounds us, the prison that holds us in its chains. In our own eyes we measure ourselves against the obstacles, and determine we are weak and unable to prevail, mere grasshoppers before our Goliaths.

And so we come to God looking for His help for our cause. Yet there are times that our weaknesses and defeat is a good thing. For until we come to the realization that Christ is the answer we need, not favorable circumstances which He promised He knew we are in need of and would attend to after we had first recognized our need for His work on our behalf and our rest and trust in what He has done rather than what we are enabled to do, until we come to that position in our relationship with God, we are often seeking to build and maintain a house on sand.

Jesus never said He was here to fortify our sandy foundations. He said if we were to see the kingdom of God, we would need to be born again, that we need to leave our old foundation on the cross with Him, and begin to build on the rock, Jesus Christ Himself, risen and seated at the right hand of the Father, and ourselves seated with Him as we are now clothed with His likeness, members of His body, joint heirs of all He has been given due to His work on our behalf to fulfill God's purpose due to His love for His fallen and lost creation.

Philippians 2:5-11 Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

God is seeking those not looking for a fix to their current way of trying to make their fallen natures, in which since Adam is death, somehow achieve eternity. The life He would give us is to be found only in His Son, because in Him, we are reconnected to God in whom we live, move and have our being. It is He who has made us, not we ourselves, yet since the fall, that has been the goal we have been striving for without Him, and to which many would even seek His help in achieving.

To the Philippian jailer who asked, "what must I do to be saved" Paul responded with the Gospel, "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household". To the man who sought the work he should do in order to inherit eternal life Jesus responded with the Gospel: "This is the work of God, that you believe on Him whom He has sent".

Acts 16:25-32 But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were loosed. And the keeper of the prison, awaking from sleep and seeing the prison doors open, supposing the prisoners had fled, drew his sword and was about to kill himself. But Paul called with a loud voice, saying, "Do yourself no harm, for we are all here."

Then he called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. And he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

So they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household." Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house.

Paul was able to hear this message for himself when he came to the end of his reliance on his religious achievements according to the law when he looked inside himself, when he was truthful about what was in his heart, when he discovered that the heart of man is deceitful and wicked, there is none righteous, no not one, and that by the works of the law no flesh could be justified, only a continual offering of blood in the temple, for without the shedding of blood, no flesh is justified.

Philippians 3:7-11 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.

But when would it end, and eternity in the presence of God begin? For that solution, God obligated Himself alone in a covenant with Abraham, when God alone passed between the torn animals signifying that He would take responsibility for both parties (Genesis 15:1-15). And so He did when He offered His only begotten Son to be made sin on our behalf that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

Galatians 4:4-5 But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.

2 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.

God is not looking for people who will try to perfect themselves once they find the right religious prescription; He is looking for those who would be made perfect in the beloved, His Son, leaving as worthless what they were attempting to make on the bases of the fallen foundation into which they were born as descendants of Adam.

Galatians 2:18-20 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.

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.

When we come to the place of rest in Christ, many of the questions we have about how and why are answered in Christ. Indeed, if Christ is not the answer, we may be asking the wrong questions, and seeking the wrong solutions according to God's ultimate plan for saving and restoring His lost and fallen creation.

Often times the choices people make in life and the things they do are not necessarily a conscious decision to choose between column A or column B on a list of possible choices and actions, some choosing good, some choosing bad, but rather our choices are motivated by the root, our foundation, our bases for our orientation to ourselves and the world around us.

Jesus said that where our treasure is, there our heart would be also. It is out of the heart that come the issues of life, it is out of the heart that man speaks. Ultimately, where we are rooted and grounded, where we are abiding in the fundamental core of who we are, the place where we base our ultimate identity of ourselves, will be the most significant factor responsible for the actions that we choose to take and the decisions we make. It was in addressing that very issue that John the Baptist spoke of the axe having to be laid at the root of the tree in preparation for the reception of the kingdom of God offered for those who would become partakers of Christ.

We all want to prune branches, but few have the courage to expose the root of who we are because there only God's grace can be sought as a remedy for our ultimate fallen condition. In the realm of the superficial and external where we judge by actions and not the true heart and motivation for what we do, man can still hope that he can continue to trust in himself. But two lies need to be dealt with, one that God cannot be trusted, and two, that we can exist without dependence on him as we learn to operate as god ourselves.

This was the lie Adam and eve believed in the garden, and which forever changed the nature of man as he placed the responsibility of his being on himself. His first discovery as he evaluated himself with the knowledge of good and evil was that he was naked, and so he hid from the Holy presence of God, and forever more his children seek to acquire clothing to cover themselves. God is offering a chance to begin again clothed in His Son, the garments offered to those who would accept His invitation to the wedding supper of the Lamb.

And Jesus spoke to those that would follow Him that they would need to pick up their cross. Being born again is a fundamental change at the root of who we are. Our relationship being broken to the first Adam, that we might be born again in Christ and begin building anew on the foundation of who we are in Jesus who is the last Adam.

It is self interest, not love that acts and performs actions on behalf of what it will receive as payment in return. That is not what the bible speaks of when it speaks of fruit. Fruit is the natural outgrowth of the plant from the root. Make the tree good, Jesus said, and the fruit will be good also.

We are told we must love the Lord God with all our heart, soul mind and strength. We are not to come to Him and act loving towards Him so that He will do things for us, but we love Him and serve Him out of love and each other on His behalf, because of what He has already done for us in Christ. One is deeds, the actions of a slave, one if fruit, the result of receiving God's grace and forgiveness in Christ. He

who did not spare His one Son, but delivered Him up for us, how will He not with Him give us all things?

We are complete in Christ. We need a revelation of the riches and glory of our inheritance in Christ for all who have put their faith in Him. When we come to the realization of what God is offering us in Christ that we gladly let go of all that we tried to hold in His place.

God help the person who attends a religious gathering in Christ's name who goes home feeling justified because they performed in a way that based on their external outward appearance they attained to the status or ranking of one deserving of God's favor. Our works are disqualified as fruit the minute we turn try to redeem them for profit. Fruit is a result.

Do we have faith? James says we will see the evidence by what we do. Are we doing works hoping to earn entrance into God's favor? Those who work are slaves who must work for their wages, but faith is exercised by those who are sons and daughters, heir of the kingdom in Christ, God's children.

They will know you are my disciples Jesus said, by your love for one another, that love you have because you have understood and received the love that God first had for you when He so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, and the prayer Jesus told us to pray is likewise; Lord forgive us as those we forgive. To the woman who dared enter the Pharisees house and wash the feet of Jesus with her tears and hair, Jesus said her sins were forgiven, for she loved much. She did not work for forgiveness; she showed the fruits of being forgiven.

Luke 17:5-10 And the apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith." 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. And which of you, having a servant plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, 'Come at once and sit down to eat'? But will he not rather say to him, 'Prepare something for my supper, and gird yourself and serve me till I have eaten and drunk, and afterward you will eat and drink'? Does he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I think not. So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, 'We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.'"

God is not out to help someone become a better white man, or a better black man, or a more successful CEO, a better lover, a better cook. God is out to make a new creation in Christ. If we build our life on ourselves, that is sand. If we build on the rock, that is our life hid in Christ in God.

Some sing the song "take my life" and ask God to take their lives to make it something better. Yet scripturally God is looking for those who will leave the unfinished business of their old lives and take the finished life He is offering in Christ.

For some, church is where they go once a week to please God. For some, it is a place of evangelism, where people can come to hear the message of the Gospel. For others, it is a place to come to learn how to better build their lives during the coming week.

But we must ask where today is the church coming together and fellowshiping as the body of Christ, where He is the focus, not a leader or teacher, but as the very way, truth and life of the church where all come to the knowledge and rest in their completeness in Christ, the foundation, body and head of the church, the way,

truth and life of all who through faith in Christ become members of God's household, translated out of this present kingdom of darkness and into the kingdom of God's Son?

When two or three come together in His name, there He is in their midst.

When people come together only to remind each other how they measure up according to the world's standards of success, even if they feel they have been helped to achieve that success by supernatural help, there is the power of ego, not spirit. People are growing more self centered rather than Christ centered.

Those in the kingdom of God are those who have their names written in the book of life. We are to set as a goal for ourselves and each other in the fellowship of faith in Christ, the goal of individually and corporately seeking first His kingdom. It is then those things the gentiles seek, in which they mistakenly think they live, will be added to us, when Christ, not the things the non believers seek is our goal. It is when we no longer depend on the weak and elementary things of this world that they can be added to us, for we recognize they are temporal and soon to pass away.

A lot of people put their focus on physical things, even buildings in the name of God. But God's focus will always be on His body, the church of which He is the builder and only foundation that can be laid.

1 Corinthians 3:11 For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

Unfortunately, those who have a vision of the kingdom of God being of this world, will often purposely or unconsciously lead or manipulate those following them into becoming convinced that their followers personal success is based on their participation in helping build a physical kingdom birthed from the ambitious vision of man, but not God's revelation of the church as the body of Christ.

Often in our search for truth we can arrive at a place where we understand certain concepts or ideas completely enough so that they form a self enclosed system that is able to define itself. These complete ideas are very compelling because they offer us the opportunity based on our own understanding to go on and define all other things, just as Adam sought to name all the animals. It is in our nature to do this.

The problem is that often we prematurely come to a place of completeness, where we can generate answers to all the questions we think need to be answered from within the framework and system of knowledge that we have gained in our quest to understand the truth that God has communicated to us, before coming to the full and complete knowledge of everything that God has communicated.

Too often dogmatic theology becomes our structure and frame of reference when we come upon a Biblically incomplete understanding that yet seems complete in itself only because it allows us to generate answers from within its own structure of logic. When we come to the place where we need to defend our theology against the plain teaching of scripture, we have gone, as Paul says, beyond what is written.

True knowledge of God and His intentions concerning us will not always come with our completely understanding why some things are so. The Bible speaks about how the ways of God are higher than mans. But we can know what He intends for us to know both in His written word and in his direct communication and leading through His indwelling Spirit which seals all those who believe the Gospel. Some of what we learn we will simply have to accept without knowing why a certain things are so from God's point of view.

This is why the Word became flesh. God has made the criteria for understanding what He intends us to know a matter of heart, not intellect, so that all must receive the message of the Gospel as a child in order to receive the full knowledge of what He intends us to know to be restored to fellowship with Him.

Yet simply because an idea or truth is simple does not necessarily mean that idea or truth is any less profound. Many often overlook the simplicity of the doctrine of new life in Christ and find the message of the cross foolishness.

We do not by nature want to die to that which we are bound, we want it restored, made strong so that we might continue to rely on what we have built on our old foundation. For Jews seek for signs, and Greeks for wisdom, but God has a very simple message concerning His solution to our fallen condition that He has presented to mankind revealed in Christ.

We should not let it be a stumbling block to our intellects, but rather, we should allow the Holy Spirit to enlighten our hearts so that we might know the height and depth of God's love for us and the riches and Glory of the inheritance of those who have faith in Christ and through Him become members of God's kingdom by adoption.

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, 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.

Our ultimate success or failure is not based on how we are going to get to a certain destination. When Paul spoke of pressing on, to the mark for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ, he was really talking about standing still and letting all the false supports of the world and his own works of righteousness fall off, of his conscious decision to no longer hold on to them as having any value, so that he could come to the place where he would be fully resting on and supported by what God was offering him as a foundation in Christ.

Often our dilemma is not how to get out of a situation, but who we are while we are in it. And while many are seeking to overcome their weaknesses so that they can become strong according to the world's definition of strength and success, the scripture tells us that 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 (2 Chronicles 16:9).

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.

Paul also found this principle when he sought the Lord three times for a thorn from the devil to be removed from his flesh only to have God reveal to him that God's strength is made perfect in our conscious weakness.

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.

We are not to come in our own strength and in our own name on behalf of the Lord. As ambassadors of Christ we are to be clothed with Him and only speak with authority in His name when we abide in Him. Jesus said unless you abide in Me, you can do nothing.

Jesus reminded his followers that a slave cannot have two masters, that one cannot serve God and money, and yet by the world's definition of strength and mistaking the kingdom of men for the kingdom of God, which are all of those who have been translated into Christ, many have made an idol of money simply because they viewed it as a means of serving God.

We often fall into the old pattern of natural thinking that concludes that the more money one has, the more one can serve God. So God is often displaced by this new idol in the name of serving God.

And yet we see it is not by might, and not by power, but by the spirit of God that He will build His church. There is more power in the Gospel than there is in any work that man could do on behalf of God in the name of reaching the lost. For until men are drawn to Christ as He is lifted up, we are only lifting ourselves up and telling men to follow us to do as we do to earn the temporal rewards we think we possess, rather than to follow Christ and to rest in what He has already accomplished, our hearts and treasure in heaven, in Him.

Too often looking at things from the external view of the world and what it considers successful we often measure the message by the messenger. And yet truth is truth regardless of who is speaking it.

As long as we are focused on the things we think we need down here we are not going to be focused on the things we have in Christ, our treasures in heaven.

Jesus said that God knows full well the things we have need of in our temporal day to day circumstances we encounter while still in this tent that we inhabit in this world. All the gentiles, those outside of the kingdom of God seek these things. He

told us not to be anxious for food or clothing asking what shall we eat, what shall we drink, instead He told us first to seek His kingdom and all these other things would be added unto us.

We should seek to learn the secret of being content in all circumstances that Paul spoke about. For it isn't where we are, or what we physically possess, but what Christ has done in which we rest and have our final peace from which we cannot be moved, that rock where we are to stand fast, where the winds and waves and the circumstances of this life are things we walk through rather than carried.

That is when we start building character that is not dependant on circumstances. It is one thing to be overjoyed when circumstances go our way, it is another to do as Paul and Silas did in the Philippians' jail where they praised God for who He is and what He had done, even while they were physically chained in a prison.

They were not praising God in the Philippians jail because they hoped God would hear their songs and be impressed enough to free them. They were praising Him because they were already free because of what god had done on their behalf in Christ.

It was not a disbelief in miracles that kept those in Jesus' home town from seeing many healings. Rather, it was their refusal to accept that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself. When those who came understood the authority of Jesus and knew He had the power to forgive men's sins it was those who were able to receive His miracle working power.

It is the reception of the Gospel in simplicity and purity of the truth and abiding in Christ that will avail us fully of the power of the Holy Spirit to work through us. For the Holy Spirit was given, Jesus said, to take that which was His and reveal it to us. To walk in His authority and to do the things He did we need to be clothed in Him, in His likeness, building ourselves up in our most holy faith on the foundation of Christ both individually and corporately.

Christ is the foundation of the church which is His body and Christ is the head of the church. The church is made up of a peculiar people, a people looking for a city whose building and foundation is God. The church and its members are not to be seeking to build a kingdom according to the world's standards of success and to try to establish a continuing home down here in a place we should know is temporary and eventually to pass away. For the Bible speaks of how it is better to be absent from the body and be present with the Lord.

Our hope should not be to continue indefinitely here but for the new heavens and the new earth in which we will be clothed in His likeness and be joint heirs with Him in the true kingdom of God.

When we seek God only as a means to further establish ourselves in the security of the things of this world we are not seeking Him for who He is, and we are not receiving the gift that He is offering which is His Son Christ.

Many sought Jesus for the loaves and the fish. You seek me, Jesus said, because you ate of the loaves and the fish and were filled. But then Jesus began to speak about the true water that quenches for eternity, which was Himself. And it was at that point that many of those who had enthusiastically followed Him then turned away and followed after Him no more.

The question is, what kind of help are we looking for? Have we truly come to appreciate the extent of our need for what He is offering in Christ?

Romans 7:24-25 O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!

Isaiah 9:2

The people who walked in darkness
Have seen a great light;
Those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death,
Upon them a light has shined.

John 8:12 Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, “I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.”

John 1:1-5 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

Ephesians 5:14 Therefore He says: “Awake, you who sleep, Arise from the dead, And Christ will give you light.”