

# Faith and Works XLIII

The Contemporary and Biblical Contexts

Col. 2:8

# Leadership

Society is increasingly facing a situation where the more powerless government and politicians make their constituents and those same constituents therefore grow more dependent on government for solutions to the problems that government often directly or indirectly precipitates, the more powerful and necessary the politicians and ever increasing government become.

As in politics, so in religion.

There are some leaders, claiming to be led by the Lord, but what they are really doing is leading people after themselves in the name of the Lord.

The stronger the pull of a religious or spiritual leader to draw followers to himself, the greater he or she will seek to diminish the focus on Jesus and doctrinally sound exegesis of the Bible.

In order for leaders to draw followers, they need to fulfill or invent a need that only they can fulfill. If all our needs are met according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus, the first thing that needs to happen to establish the need of the leader is to present the work of Christ as incomplete.

This changes the position of the believer from one of rest in Christ, to one of activity to complete what is still lacking in their salvation as defined by the leadership. The leadership then draws followers promising to lead them to where they can complete what is still lacking in their spiritual development or relationship with God.

Growth in Christ is not a matter of our achieving new levels of ability or power on our own, rather the New Testament presents our growth in Christ coming as we become less reliant on our strength and seeking to maintain and build on our old fallen foundation inherited from Adam, and instead coming to the place where Christ is our life and we rest in the assurance that we are complete in Him.

True shepherds do not lead the sheep after themselves, they lead them to Christ.

The only way the Gospel ceases to be relevant is when we stop asking the questions God is answering. We are to present the Gospel, Christ crucified for our sins, and ourselves by faith in His resurrection on our behalf, risen and seated with Him.

**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.

If we are hearing our leaders give advice on how to achieve a better life style we are not being presented with the new life offered us by God in His Son.

We keep hearing reinterpretations of the Gospel as a path to self transformation, that it is something to help us improve our life, sometimes with, sometimes without God's help, when Biblically, the Gospel is about being translated into Christ who becomes our life.

The harsh discipline of a given religious group is often offset by the pride and self esteem those who feel they feel when they think they have merited reward and favor based on their works. The frustration and anger is deliberately transferred to those who do not belong to the group and have not worked as did they at meeting the standards set by the group.

**1 Cor. 3:5-11** Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase. Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor.

For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building. According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

We seem to have leaders going in many different directions these days, and the one direction not being followed that they all seem to avoid is the path Jesus spoke of.

While there are those who would argue for sound Biblical doctrine, often they have a love of approaching theology as fodder to be chewed over in dialog and conversation, as they love talking about truth more than they love the truth they are talking about.

This is probably why even some of those who academically take orthodox positions concerning the doctrines of the Bible will find little to be concerned about after a given debate for truth is over, and will often collaborate and fellowship with those with non-orthodox positions, due to the issue of Biblical truth being merely on the plane of ideas rather than the acceptance or denial of Jesus Christ, in whom we are to abide and find our life.

Thus they tend to be more passionate about the truth of their positions intellectually rather than passionate about whether the truths in the bible represent truth concerning our place in eternity.

Those seeking to present teachings relevant and in context with the current social consensus will often approach the bible with their own truths firmly in mind, and then proceed to redefine words and passages of scripture to fit the context of their own opinions, leaving those scriptures often divorced and orphaned from the original context in the Bible.

For instance, one might take the scripture that says God is love, then define love in such a way that the God they are defining is now limited and incomplete from the complete picture the biblical presents of God.

It is the Gospel that is presented, not the presentation that should be the focus.

As Paul points out, the real strength of a leader in the Gospel is not their charisma, or dramatic presentation, but rather their ability to lead their followers to the Gospel, and to discern when the path has turned to another direction.

**2 Corinthians 10:1-5** Now I, Paul, myself am pleading with you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ—who in presence am lowly among you, but being absent am bold toward you. But I beg you that when I am present I may not be bold with that confidence by which I intend to be bold against some, who think of us as if we walked according to the flesh. For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. 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.

The Apostle Peter writes about how the motivation for those teachers and leaders who lead their followers away from Christ is their greed, either for money, pride, or both.

**2 Peter 2:1-3** But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed. By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words.

Paul was not looking for followers of himself, he was looking for the fruit of those who took his direction to turn to the Gospel, and the fruit that resulted from those who had truly believed and received the finished work of Christ on their behalf.

The attitude of the early apostles and church leaders is that they were fellow workers and fellow partakers of the faith they sought to achieve themselves and encourage in each other. They valued the object of this faith, Christ, more than the prestige, fame and accolades that worldly leaders sought. Jesus taught them that those who would be great would become each others servant not as a work, but out of the genuine love that resulted from a heart washed clean in the forgiveness of Christ. They were not looking to lead people after themselves, they were seeking to lead disciples to the door, Christ.

**Col. 1:3-6** We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, 4 since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all the saints; 5 because of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel, 6 which has come to you, as it has also in all the world, and is bringing forth fruit, as it is also among you since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth.

**Jude 1:21** keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.

**John 15:9-17** “As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love.

“These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full. This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends. You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you. You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you. These things I command you, that you love one another.

In the parable of the talents, there is increase, interest from the gift given. Those who buried it in the ground provided no soil, lost their first love, did not respond and grow in the gift they were given. We are to build with gold, tested and purified with fire, on the new foundation, the only foundation that can be laid for the new birth into the kingdom of God's son, which is no longer ourselves, but Christ Himself. It is this we are to be clothed with, gold refined by fire.

**Revelation 3:17-18** Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’— and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked — I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see.

**1 Corinthians 3:10-13** According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is.

As long as we view our faith as something we must progress in our own works, we will be focused and reliant on ourselves for our success in this life and the next, still building on the old foundation. This is the carnal thinking that the bible speaks of, and the mind set on the flesh is death.

When we measure ourselves by ourselves using the current standards of society instead of the measurement of Christ, we will inevitably sabotage our ability to have true love for the brethren, and even ourselves as we are once again in the position of meriting God's favor based on the merits of our works at improving ourselves.

It is all well and good to speak of our need to be humble and avoid pride, yet if we do so as a means of simply acting that way to merit approval by our external behavior, the root will still be in us. We may clean the outside of the cup, but inwardly we will be full of dead men's bones.

Christianity is less about a process of personal improvement, and more about our identifying ourselves with the person of Christ, joint heirs with Him, members of the family of God in the body of Christ.

When the Gospel is not presented as what Christ has done for us, our resting in that, and allowing the change in our hearts to manifest in genuine love and forgiveness for those around us, and instead the Gospel is presented as a matter of

what we must do to be saved by our learning the correct performance, we will inevitably be following those who present themselves as knowledgeable and successful in performing and achieving success by their works. Our attention will be on leaders rather than Christ as instead of His grace we seek what we must do to achieve success in the things of God.

**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.”

While cults and false leaders have been tested by whether or not they acknowledge who Jesus Christ is, within the modern church there has very little effort to examine whether or not the current popular teachings do not in fact give only lip service to the Lordship and identity of Christ, while denying the power of His life, the message of the cross, the truth of our crucifixion with Him, our foundation no longer on what was destroyed but built on faith in Him. We have not died while we yet struggle to live and improve that which God intended to be left on the cross.

Our growth in Christ is not a matter of how great we can become, but rather, how great He becomes to us.

Signs and Wonders were promised by Jesus to be performed by false leaders in the last days. The presence of seeming miracles should not be used as an excuse for following leaders whose direction is contrary to the Gospel, the argument often being that one is too critical or rational in appraising the given teachings or direction of the leaders one will not have enough faith to receive a miracle, the question should be would not more miracles be present when followers are led to Christ rather than a false leader.

They are the blind leading the blind, and both fall into a ditch, no longer on the path, not traveling a straight line, looking back, not focusing on Jesus.

Public opinion is increasingly used by forces opposed to having their sins forgiven exposed by the Gospel, those who would continue to go their own way for no better reason than that it is theirs.

When society has stereotyped conservatives as mean and out to hurt poor people, those who are concerned with how they are seen in the eyes of the public will often choose their politics or religion based on how they will be viewed by other people, not due to their own internal convictions concerning truth, but because their internal image of themselves is reinforced and defined by those around. There are those the bible speaks of who not spiritually minded, but carnally minded, measure themselves by themselves.

When we only seek Him for aid in our attempts to know peace and comfort in our present circumstances, we are calling Him to aid us in completing our own work. We are not seeking Him for the offering He extends to us for eternity in His Son Jesus Christ.

Religion is often something we do for ourselves, not on behalf of God.

It is the idea that we can create our religious experience, summon it at will, and that experience will supersede our natural experience so that we can continue on the bases of our feelings.

We often define the success of faith in terms of how it aids us in achieving the success that the world is seeking, because, like Simon the sorcerer in the book of Acts, access to Gods power is sought for the benefits of establishing and continuing our secure existence in what we have built on our own foundation, and not that of Christ.

In Biblical Christianity, those who wished to be leaders were to become servants, and the purpose of the gifts of the Spirit were not given so that an advanced or anointed few could interpret God for the rest of the congregation, but instead, the gifts were given to aid in the development of the body of Christ to come to a

complete knowledge of what it meant to be members of His body, joint heirs with Him, with consideration for each other on the bases of their being one in Christ. The good works that Christians did were seen as evidence that they had truly received in their hearts the truth of the Gospel, not as payment for actions deserving merit in a system of works.

The idea that our personal relationship to God is somehow tied to and dependant on our relationship to a figure head or someone representing God to us is foreign to Christianity.

Those who would position their leadership as indispensable for the Body of Christ, do so by redefining the foundation and the dynamic of the body of Christ so that it is dependent on them, rather than unified by all being found complete and clothed in Christ.

True leaders in the body of Christ are not trying to lead people after themselves on a personal crusade to build bigger and better monuments by the hand of man, instead they are trying to aid the body of Christ to come to a state of maturity in who they are in Christ, and see the fruit of their characters as they now relate to each other, God and themselves on the bases of the Gospel, instead of the external evaluations the world uses that measure ourselves by ourselves.

This is why true moves of God's spirit are very carefully orchestrated so that those participants who lead those movements do not draw attention to themselves, but rather contribute to the work of the Holy Spirit to draw attention to Christ.

For the true spirit of prophecy is the testimony not of the prophet as a speaker of mysteries, but of Jesus.

The schemes and solutions they offer as they seek to draw people after them are only placebos and anesthetics for the fallen condition, an attempt to take comfort in the music still played by the band on the deck of the sinking ship, it is not the new life that in Christ that the Gospel offers.

The pride of man will always fill the void left by the absence of the true Gospel. The true Gospel brings about a humility, in that God had to give His only begotten Son as ransom for humanity, because of man there was not one righteous, no not one. True leaders, in the sense of the Gospel, will not be leading followers after themselves, but will be leading them to Jesus, the door, so that they may enter in to restored fellowship with God through the only way He has provided, His Son, Jesus Christ.

The Gospel message is not about our boasting about what we have done with God as our resource. The true Gospel is about what we have found with God as our source.

The merchant of fine pearls did not sell all that he had to demonstrate his dedication and self sacrifice, he sold all that he had because he recognized, and had a vision of, the greater value of what he was being offered in its place. It is not that we are earning what God is offering in Christ by what we do, it is that we cease doing the work of earning for ourselves when we come to rest in what He has already done.

The false shepherds that Jesus spoke about who come to steal, kill and destroy, in John Chapter 10, lead the sheep away from Christ and to themselves, using the sheep for their own purposes, to build their own kingdoms. Whenever the true kingdom of the Gospel fails to be preached, the kingdom of man will take its place.

Jesus is the good shepherd because He rightly draws men to himself as a shepherd, as He is also Himself the door, the one mediator between man and God.

**John 14:6** Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.

Religion is of no value against the flesh. The Pharisees of Jesus day tithed everything in strict observance of the Law and their traditions, and yet Jesus said inside they were full of greed, covetousness and self indulgence. We must

understand, as God will not be mocked, that when we give the fallen nature of man, the flesh, is given pre-eminence and focus, as if all depended still on what we build on our old fallen foundation that we inherited from the first Adam, whether in severe treatment of the body, or in a hedonistic life style, it is the pre-eminence that the self seeks, it seeks our continued obligation and need to meet its debt for the toll necessary to enter eternity.

As long as we are convinced our faith is tied to how well we can keep our own boat afloat, we will only seek God for maintenance on our leaking soon to sink vessel that we inherited from Adam. If we seek God's presence in our lives only as a means for achieving the ends and meeting the debt of our flesh the true power of the Gospel will be of no value to us.

And yet, our fallen nature is not our only option for a foundation, the fallen eternal perishing tent we inhabit in this fallen and soon to be judged world, is not our only option. The boat may appear to be sinking, yet, Christ bids us come, to walk on the turbulent waters stirred by the ending turmoil of this soon to pass away age, with our eyes fixed on Him, the author, prefector and finisher of our faith, in Him who we are complete, the anchor that keeps us steady that is secured even beyond the veil of this present age.

Paul did not preach himself, but he preached Christ and Him crucified. For all our attempts at following leaders and going here and there on all these different causes and programs, none of them has the effectiveness of transforming individual lives, and thus collectively, transforming society, as does the power of the true Gospel when it is received in the good soul of those who have repented of dead works and who hunger and thirst for God's righteousness. The Gospel motivates by what has been received, not by what might be earned by posturing and external performance.

The biggest mistake the modern institutional church has made has been to follow the worlds pattern of seeking to empower man and improve him so that he might

achieve eternal greatness, instead of presenting Him in Whom we were to abide and be complete in Him, who is great, Jesus Christ.

We have taught the fruit of the spirit as works that we do, in imitation of a true transformed heart overflowing with love and gratitude because it has received first of the love that God shown us in giving His only begotten Son to be sin on our behalf that we might become the righteousness of God in Christ.

In all the works we do, on behalf of simply appearing to be loving and righteous, if they are only a means of dressing up the old self, and trying to present that to God and each other, and inside we have not changed, we have simply used the Gospel for a pattern and template for changing our eternal actions, and have not received the Gospel as a child in the heart, and truly believed it, and allowed our actions, as James points out in his New Testament letter, to speak more loudly about our faith than our words.

Feeding the sheep with the Word is not about endless prescriptions, techniques and formulas, and regimens of self effort in order to improve ourselves. Rather it is presenting the Word, Christ Himself, until we all come to a unity of the true faith, until we are standing not on ourselves and our works and presenting ourselves to each other and to God based upon what we have done or achieved on our own strength. But when we have in humility have let all those things go, so that we might receive, and stand in and abide in and continue in faith in the finished work of Christ on our behalf.

The goal of true leaders in the church and in the work of the Gospel is not to reform men and transform them by leading them on into endless prescriptions of works of achieving righteousness. But instead it is to help them to become good soil for the seed of the Gospel. To help them stay focused on the author, prefector, and finisher of our faith, which is Christ Himself. It is to help them understand and to put faith, not in the transitory circumstances of the external things which are perishing, but on the unseen things, to which the Holy Spirit within those who have

received and are sealed by faith in Christ, is witnessing. That completeness and rest that says it is better to be absent from the body and be present with the Lord. That we will one day be clothed with His likeness when we finally see Him face to face at His coming for the redemption of all things at the end of this present age.

**Luke 17:33** Whoever seeks to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it.

**2 Cor. 2:16-18** 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.

The true work of a leader in the church is to bring the body of Christ to that point where they reach the maturity and completeness of what it means to be in Christ. To a place where the works of ego and pride in the flesh are no longer debts that men continue to seek to pay because they have allowed that self to die in its importance because something greater has come. The externals become to those with truth in the inner parts, as worthless, and those who turn to Christ reconstitute themselves in the natural to be dead with Christ on the cross, crucified with Him, no longer bound, no longer a debtor to the demands of the flesh.

**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, 18 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.

It is our debt that we are born with that we can never pay, because we can never satisfy our need to be as God so that we might achieve eternity in our alienated state apart from Him. God has in His Son fulfilled the requirements He has for us, and has made a new way for His fallen creation to be restored into intimate fellowship with Him. It is our pride and the refusal to admit our mortal fallen condition before the presence of God that keeps us hiding amongst the fig leaves.

**Luke 7:47** Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little.”

And yet the veil has been torn, a way has been made, a door, Christ Himself, has been opened granting entrance into the presence God for those who would enter not clothed in their own filthy rags, but wearing instead the very likeness of His Son, and so we become members of His body, joint heirs with Him.

When we measure ourselves and evaluate ourselves by what we have been freely given in Christ and are thus humble before God due to our awareness of our being forgiven a debt we could not pay, and we show as we have received, that same forgiveness to those who are our neighbors, those we come in contact with day by day, it is then we are truly transformed and showing fruit, gold build on the

foundation of Christ, tested by the fires that burn all that was of the old foundation of pride, ego and self works.

**John 10:1-16** “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. Yet they will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.” Jesus used this illustration, but they did not understand the things which He spoke to them.

Then Jesus said to them again, “Most assuredly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who ever came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. But a hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep. I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd.