

Faith and Works XLV

The Contemporary and Biblical Contexts

Col. 2:8

As a Child

Even while the good news of new life in Jesus Christ was being proclaimed and demonstrated in power by the original Apostles, the enemies bent on keeping mankind in darkness, and shut in by the gates of Hades, were at work to counter the message of the Gospel by coming as angles of light mixing subtle lies with truth in order to lead the sheep after themselves rather than to Christ.

The true apostles of Jesus admonished their disciples to continue to study the scriptures, to become wise as serpents concerning the enemies' deceptions, to cast down every thought that sought to rise above the supreme knowledge of Christ and His finished work. But false apostles often, as they do even today, sought to lead their followers away from the scriptures by proclaiming new revelations based on their own dreams and supposed encounters with angelic beings.

There are also teachers who sincerely follow false teachers, by relying on what tickles their ears to lead them to false doctrines that incorrectly define the context of the Gospel. But there is no remedy in the medicine they are taking and trying to share with others. The medicine is actually the cause of the problems that the true Biblical Gospel would cure, for a partial Gospel is no Gospel.

For in order for false teachers to draw men to themselves, they must present an incomplete Gospel that now needs their own contribution in order for it to be completed. But only, of course, if the followers have paid the price asked of teacher to acquire it. Usually the followers are assured that their contributions will be reciprocated by a divine system of accounting that is contractually obligated to honor the business transactions of the ministry. A typical condition of those following a ministry of this type is that the followers are ever learning, but never coming to knowledge of the truth. Each week or month there will be a new reason to turn once again to seek the aid the ministry is offering. We notice the Apostle

Paul considered his ministry a success when those who heard the Gospel progressed to the point of bearing fruit on their own.

The gifts given as willed by the Holy Spirit to the body of Christ, Paul taught, all work together so that all the members of the body can come to a complete understanding of who Christ is, and what constitutes being a member of His body and a joint heir with Him.

There is always a certain amount of truth in all false teachings. But when taken as a whole, those teachings leave out the centrality of Christ which is the focus of the true Biblical Gospel. False teachings shift the focus from Jesus back to ourselves or something or someone else. The nature of the system is no longer based upon who we are in Christ, but how we are to work to become as Christ, or imitate Christ, or even to operate as God supposedly operates on behalf of knowing as He knows. That is when all of the devils work and strategies are successful and complete.

The Devil does not mind if we are religious, he does not mind if we attend long prayer services, he does not mind if we speak in tongues for hours on end. The Devil is not afraid of incense, stained glass windows, loud music or dancing. He is not afraid of “hell fire preaching” as long as it results in the hearer seeking by their own efforts to make themselves righteous.

He is also not particularly interested in whether we are prosperous or poor, in good health or bad. As long as he can keep us distracted, he will use whatever is successful at drawing our attention away from Christ.

What the Devil is primarily concerned about and actively seeks to prevent is our making Christ the foundation of who we are by faith and our resting, abiding and operating on behalf of the finished work of Jesus Christ. Such a believer is not working to complete himself; he is working because by faith he knows he or she is already complete in Christ.

As long as the devil keeps our minds set on the flesh as our foundation, the end result of this carnal mindedness will be death. The gates of Hades will continue to prevail, they will not be opened by the arm of flesh for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified. And in this carnal state, the actions of men will still be ultimately motivated by fear of the first death, and their actions will be consumed with the never ending attempt to compensate the eternal hole left by our separation from God. They will continually be attempting to pay the debt our flesh mandates to be paid by seeking to satisfaction through of the lust of the eyes and the pride of life.

The spirit of Anti-Christ was already at work at the time of the Apostles. We can expect its continued work even in our own day until the coming of our Lord to reign on the Earth.

Those following false teachers, the wolves in sheep's clothing, often become anemic in their ability to appraise or question information beyond the carefully structured boundaries reinforced by the teachings of those who do not wish the sheep to stray from their pen.

Thus to question the authority or teaching of those seeking others to follow them is to be found disloyal, in offence, unloving, rebellious, and not wanting the benefits promised for those following and supporting the leader. This is usually reinforced with fear of excommunication from the social group held together by the leader and in which an individual has come to be supported. So any attempt to question leadership of the group or the teachings held by the group is also seen as repudiation of what the group stands for, and will result in rejection and alienation of the individual. Yet fear of man is a snare.

God commands us to love Him with all our heart, all our soul, and all our strength. He will never lead us into a situation where honoring Him as Lord will cause us to disobey the whole counsel of His Word.

We are to test the spirits, the teachings of those who claim to be apostles, those who present a different Gospel or another Jesus, even if they come as an angel of light. For who He is, and the provision in Christ that God has made on behalf of the world, and man's need to be born again into a living faith in the finished work of Christ by repenting from the dead works based on the old fallen nature, these are all issues that have eternal consequences. We are not to fear those who after they have killed the body can do no more, but rather, the scriptures teach, fear Him whom after He has killed can cast into Hell.

Often then, reason is portrayed by those seeking to draw disciples to themselves, as an enemy of faith. And faith, and revelation of the meaning of scriptures, is portrayed as an act that is only authentic when achieved void of logic or understanding. Emotion and experience are said to give validity to what is to be considered spiritual truth rather than everything being tested by the Word of God, the faith once for all delivered to the saints, confirmed by the inner witness of the Holy Spirit.

While we are told to accept the kingdom of God as a child, yet we are also told in the New Testament not to be children in our thinking, to not be ignorant of the deceptions of the enemy of our soul.

Jesus taught His disciples that whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it (Mark 10:15). It is not the ignorance or gullibility of the child that is spoken of here, for in other places the apostles write that we are to be wise as serpents, yet harmless as a dove. It is not the simplicity of the intellect of the child that Jesus is referring to, but rather that state of being born again, of starting anew in the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ and what it means to leave our old works behind us and to begin to build on the new foundation of Christ.

It is the humble attitude, not the ignorance, of the child that Jesus spoke of. We are told to humbly accept the word of the Gospel that God has planted in our

hearts (James 1:21). When Jesus told His disciples that they would need to receive the kingdom of God as little children He was not instructing them to be ignorant of the scriptures. We are told to be workmen who do not need to be ashamed as we learn of His written word. It is not our intellect or understanding that needs to be childlike. Jesus told Nicodemus that he had to be born again or he would not see the kingdom of God.

A Child does not need a 20 DVD set of the latest popular religious teachings in order to enter into the kingdom of God. It needs only the knowledge and assurance that it is a child of its parent, and a member of its parent's household. Its learning consists not in how to be a child, but is focused on growing as a member of its parent's household, taking its character from its Father, and learning of the correct use of the privileges granted as an heir.

A child of a household is not striving to work enough to one day be allowed membership and access to the household, it is rather growing on behalf of who it is by birth. It is not building itself up as an outsider to gain inclusion in the family; it is beginning anew as a child of the household, as all things are new in Christ.

When we begin to follow certain teachers or teachings rather than seeking a revelation of God in Christ, we position ourselves into a state where we will be ever learning, but never coming to a final complete knowledge of the truth, for truth is in Jesus. He Himself, not His teaching, is the way, truth and the life; no one comes to the Father but by Him. Unless we abide in Him, we can do nothing, we produce no lasting fruit, for without faith in Him, we still continue to establish who we are on the old foundation.

To the Corinthians who had begun to split into factions following specific teachers Paul wrote to correct them and refocus them away from doctrines of techniques and works that a man might do to become greater. He sought to make them realize that they are already complete in Christ. The true church are members of Christ's body. Christ is the head and foundation of the building God is making

for His habitation. Jesus Himself is the wisdom from God, the light that shines in the darkness of man's ignorance of God.

1 Corinthians 1:30-31 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.”

Colossians 2:6-10 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.

Christ is the end of the law, that which we might strive to do by our own works, to earn righteousness. We are to abide and rest in Him, and no longer be constantly searching for the next new thing to enable us to achieve our own increase in spiritual ability and righteousness. If we are not abiding in Him, we will constantly seek things to further the flesh's agenda to preserve itself. When we abide in Christ, the old nature is let go, and we are no longer debtors to its demands, for its death is no longer our death. By faith all that we are based on the first Adam is to be left on the cross of Christ, crucified with Him, never to be used as a foundation again, for if we rebuild what we have once destroyed, we prove ourselves transgressors. We are now to live in Christ.

To those seeking repeat business and residual income, the Gospel, in its simplicity and purity, is a poor product to market. What one needs is continuous dependency, to continue to generate interest and income from those seeking to

purchase the latest knowledge or techniques that they can use to continue to work at achieving their own salvation and attempts to increase their spirituality and faith.

When the devil came to Eve and persuaded her to take the step of separation from God based on the belief that God was not to be trusted, and that with the same knowledge He had, mankind could sustain itself in eternity without being united with God, there was a hidden clause in the contract. Forever more, man would be seeking that knowledge from the spirit of the anti-Christ that would be at work in the fallen world, and that need would continually place the sheep at risk of the false shepherds.

Faith is not measured in the techniques we learn to gain greater power to do greater works. The disciples of Jesus asked Him to increase their faith, yet Jesus countered by saying faith was not an exercise of will or power, a commodity to be measured or weighed. True faith is rest and confidence in Christ. Faith is not the ability to gain spiritual power to do works for God; faith is assurance and identification in the finished work of Christ that the believer may do all things in Christ, in His authority.

Faith in Christ according to the Bible must begin with our old nature being crucified with Christ on the cross (Rom. 6, 7):

Col. 2:4-23 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.

In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. And you, being dead in your trespasses and the circumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it.

So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or Sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ. Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in false humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, and not holding fast to the Head, from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase that is from God.

Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations — “Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle,” which all concern things which perish with the using — according to the commandments and doctrines of men? These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.

Romans 6:5-11 For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Many skip over that necessary part, and seek instead to partake of the new life as an additive to increase the abilities of the old nature, rather than replace it with that which is by the new birth. The new life is usually presented as an aid to the continuing work and dependence on what the Bible calls the "first husband", our birth nature inherited from the fallen first Adam.

Those seeking a captive audience have a vested interest in keeping the first husband and the validity of its works very much alive and the main focus of attention rather than crucified and left behind as we press on, as did Paul, toward the goal for the upward call of God in Christ. The goal is where we are to stand, unmoved where we can clearly hear and receive the upward call of God in Christ.

Those captives who are set free have no need for products that promise self improvement for they are producing fruit from their new birth relationship with God, rather than trying to earn His favor through their own efforts.

When we are at last, coming to the end of our dependence to ourselves and from being slaves and debtors to the flesh, and are then seeking His righteousness, and have left our own works of righteousness as worthless, it is at that point that we can most clearly hear His call. It is about a new birth, not a continuation of the old. We are now born again of the spirit by faith in Christ as members of His household, joint heirs with Him, not servants still striving to please the master enough to earn entrance.

Anyone who bases deeds on the flesh will produce death. That the Bible promises, yet we are often still foolish, having begun in the spirit, we then turn back to the weak and worthless things, and try to be perfected in the flesh. Jesus is looking for fruit that will remain. People in the natural are looking for results; God is looking for fruit that will last.

When we focus on results, we produce deeds. When we focus on Christ, and abide in Him for who we are and what we can do, we naturally produce fruit.

Colossians 3:1-11 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.

Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them.

But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all.

When the conditions are met that Jesus is the head, foundation and foundation of the church, which is His body, and the members of the body understand their position, identity, and completeness in Christ as a joint heir with Him and not just an outward imitation of Christ, but literally being clothed with Him, then we can expect the church to begin to operate with the authority and work of the Holy Spirit in the work of the Gospel.

The testimony of Jesus is the true spirit of prophecy. When the church is presenting itself and boasting of its own accomplishments, and seeking followers of the methods of man based on man's own ability, there is a direct loss to access to the throne of God, and we will not see God grant healings, signs and wonders being done by His hand because they would not be done on behalf of the testimony of His Son (Acts 4:29-30).

All of the teachings of Jesus concern who He is and the necessary conditions for our receiving the grace of God in truth and spirit. They are not teachings on how to make ourselves spiritual or any more holy the law the Pharisees followed. It is a righteousness based by faith in the literal complete and finished work of Christ, and our basing who we are and what we do on the foundation of who He is, seated at the right hand of God the Father.

We are as a child in the sense that Jesus spoke of when we accept the kingdom of God with the humility that comes when we understand the call for repentance by John the Baptist who called not only the obvious sinners, but those

normally considered righteous by the contemporary standards of religion. For the revelation of God through history testifies that all have sinned and fallen short of the Glory of God, all are equally in need of a Savior. A missing component of works based attempts to approach God is the required temple sacrifices, for without the shedding of the blood of the perfect Lamb of God, there is no final remission of sin.

Luke 18:9-14 Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.’ And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me a sinner!’ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

It is those who hunger and thirst for God's righteousness, having come to recognize that their own is but filthy rags, and who are thus ready to place all on the foundation offered in Christ no longer trusting in their own righteousness, those who have come to the end of themselves as Paul describes of his own journey to faith.

Romans 7:24-35 O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!

Salvation in Christ is a package deal, all or nothing, finding our higher life in Him and losing our lower, or finding our lower and losing eternity. It is not just some leaves and branches that need pruning, but the axe must be laid to the root of the tree, and the branches grafted into another.

Paul's faith in Christ had come to the point where he even cast aside as worthless even his own religious credentials as a Pharisee of Pharisees.

Philippians 3:3-16 For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh, though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.

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.

Galatians 2:19-21 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.”

To Nicodemus Jesus said, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”. And those who understand this issue and how Jesus Himself is the key, will, as they search the scriptures, bring forth treasures, both old and new.

There are typically two kinds of individuals involved in religious practices. One will do things for the praise they receive from men. Others will do things in the sincere hope that the results of their efforts will be pleasing to God.

Nicodemus was of the later sort. When Jesus said to him that he had to be born again in order to see the kingdom of God, it must have come as quite a shock. Here was a man who had all the religious credentials, who had sincerely followed as best he could the prescriptions of the religious dogmas and tradition concerning what a man must do to be saved and inherit eternal life and to see God's blessing while here on earth. And yet Jesus was saying that the religious career of Nicodemus was all for nothing, as good as it was according to the consensus of man, that in the system that Jesus was presenting based on Himself, one had to begin anew.

Nicodemus was being told he had to begin anew building on a completely new foundation without any of the old structure remaining. And in fact, letting go of the security of that old foundation was a prerequisite, as Jesus instructed those seeking to follow Him to pick up their cross, leave all, and follow Him.

That is the cost to build on the new foundation. Selling all that we have, all the things that we once used to define ourselves, coming to the end of ourselves based on ourselves, seeking our higher life offered in Christ and leaving our lower life based on ourselves, picking up our cross to follow Jesus. We are to reckon our old self to be crucified with Christ, not keeping our hope and debt to it, not looking to refurbish or regenerate or renew the old nature through some infusion of spiritual enablement, or through the practice of some learned or taught technique or spiritual discipline.

All that constituted our old foundation, that place within the current world system where we found our security and assumed our completeness, is to be left behind us, cast aside as worthless, so that all may be done anew on the foundation of Christ. Religion is the process of our completing ourselves by ourselves, or with the help of some supernatural enablement. The Gospel concerns our being made complete in Christ, resting and abiding in His finished work alone, clothed in His likeness, not in our own filthy rags.

It is not the absurdity or non-reason of people acting without wisdom that demonstrates Biblical faith, but it is the simplicity and purity of devotion to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and testing all spirits by the Word of God. It is being sure and walking in faith on behalf of who Jesus is and the finished work He has done.

2 Corinthians 10:4-5 For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, 5 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.

This is the foundation then, of true Christian faith and belief, and it is our appointed task to handle the word of God as workman who need not be ashamed of careless or ignorant handling of the Word of God. It seems fitting to close here with Paul's words written to his disciple Timothy.

2 Timothy 3:1-17 But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away! For of this sort are those who creep into households and make captives of gullible women loaded down with sins, led away by various lusts, always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. Now as Jannes and Jambres resisted Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, disapproved concerning the faith; but they will progress no further, for their folly will be manifest to all, as theirs also was.

But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra—what persecutions I endured. And out of them all the Lord delivered me. Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

When the church is truly built on that foundation and all the members work together, every joint supplying its unique contribution, for the common good of

helping all the members to see themselves not as the current world system would define them based on external appearance and circumstance, but rather as people who see themselves, and their fellow members in the body of Christ, as they are defined by the Gospel.

The world will then see the love of true believers in Christ, who forgive and love each other as they have been forgiven and loved by God in His gift of Christ, a love not based on what each can receive in return, but based on the surpassing value of the treasure on which their heart is set, a treasure kept in heaven.

Those in this age, who declare they are rich and in need of nothing, are never asked the reason for their peace, only the way to acquire the material goods on which that peace is based, for temporary circumstantial peace is based on the old nature satisfying itself with the temporal things of this age, those things men store in their barns, but can never take with them on that final passage into eternity. These are the things that the Bible says are destined to perish with the final fire that will test the gold, wood, hay and stubble of all men's works, and the shakings that will prove what foundation, either rock, or sand, on which each sought to build.

1 John 5:21 Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen.