

Faith and Works XVI

The Contemporary and Biblical Contexts

Col. 2:8

Born Again, or Trying Again?

Born Again or Just Trying Again?

Galatians 2:18 For if I build again those things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor.

Year after year Christians approach growth in spiritual matters as a technique to be perfected, yet the Bible declares that unless we become as children we cannot enter the Kingdom of God. Yet we are always learning, and never coming to a knowledge of the truth, and the proof is the continuing success of self help ministries. This month the teachings will be how to get closer to God, how to become more like Jesus, or the focus will be on this or that sin or habit. All of this leaves the audience focused on themselves, and thus those ministries profiting from those in this mindset can then supply the teaching materials that promise the user spiritual results if only they learn and follow the proscribed methods, usually replete with examples of how the author achieved personal success based on their own successful operation of the teachings they are selling.

We hear these teachings, and they make perfect sense to us, because in fact, for all the talk of spirituality, the basic mechanism of understanding is the natural way of thinking we have been doing since we were born a descendant of Adam. We really need to get clear on this. Religious thinking, and the mind set on the flesh, are both two aspects of the same issue. Jesus can stand before us as the bread of life, and instead of partaking of His life, we are asking Him, as did the rich young ruler, what information He can give us, or power, so that we can improve ourselves and manifest the effects of eternal life on behalf of this earthen vessel, this tent that we temporarily inhabit. We give lip service to living on behalf of treasures in heaven, but in reality, these days the measure if one if spiritual is by whether or not one is prospering in the things the gentiles seek. And so faith is now based on results, not on revelation of eternal truth, with the promise that if we would rest in that, and

learn to be content in all circumstances, that then all the things the gentiles seek would be added.

When our focus is on what we must do to be saved, to be spiritual, to be blessed, to get closer to God, we once again build on the old foundation, we resurrect the first husband and breathe life in it, and depend on our relationship to it, once again.

And for the most part, our contemporary leadership (those successful in gaining prominence in the arena of audience membership) in seeking to market their ministries by being relevant seek to plumb God's word for advice to answer the questions of contemporary man rather than preach the eternal message of Christ.

John 5: 39-40 You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life.

The life is in Christ. God is offering not a refurbishment or make over; He is saying no one comes to the Father but through Jesus. And what is coming through is not our old nature or flesh, our works on the old foundation, but a new man or women, born again in Christ, clothed with Him. It is such a radical departure from religious self centered orientation of the natural man because for once, it is not about what we must do to be saved; it's about real Biblical faith in Christ.

Paul did not write in any of his letters "I have died to the sin of smoking" or any other sin of the week that is usually the topic when we seek to improve our spiritual stature. He wrote:

Gal. 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

When the focus turns from Christ to us that is where the yeast of the Pharisees begins to work its way in. When we begin to look at our external appearance and

circumstances, when the question becomes who are you, rather than who is Christ, we are in the realm of focusing on the flesh, and the Bible promises that the mind set on the flesh is death (Rom. 8:5-6). The Spirit is here, Jesus said, to witness to Himself (John 15:26). The mind set on the spirit will be focused on Jesus, will seek to lift Him up even as Moses lifted the bronze serpent (John 3:14-17; John 6:63). Yet most of us are following what seems natural to our carnal thinking and following those who say, now that you have begun in the spirit, now you must be perfected in the flesh (Gal. 3:3).

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."

The mind set on the flesh is death, even when the mind is set on improving the flesh with truths which in themselves are legitimate and indeed taken from God's Word. Too often we can hear a message or teaching that contains many individual truths taken from scripture, but at the end of the teaching all things are not summed on Christ, He is not lifted up, and instead we are focused on ourselves, measuring ourselves by the circumstances and success in the natural of those claiming to have operated or achieved success in doing something to improve themselves. It does not matter that we are doing something that is true, what matters it that we know that truth is in Jesus, the way, the truth, and the life.

God is looking for fruit from the seed that He has sown in our hearts, the revelation of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. He is looking for those who did not come to God for a little help, He is looking for those who know the need, and receive by faith, 100% of what God is offering in His Son. There can be no boasting, no comparing ourselves by ourselves, for we are all 100% saved, and born again in Christ. Old things are to have passed away, not polished up. All that might have been to our credit is to be considered rubbish compared to the treasure we have in Christ. It is to be the bases of all our fellowship as Christians. We are not to see each other as rich, poor, tall, short, fat or thin. There are no super

Christians, as we have freely received, so we are to freely to give to all those in need of the same grace we have received.

To the extent that the Bible speaks of Christian growth, it is in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, in maintaining steadfast faith that God has demonstrated conclusively His love for us through the supreme sacrifice of His son as a ransom for our lives and the corporate fellowship of believers recognizing themselves and each other as the literal body of Christ.

Galatians 3:28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Colossians 3:11 where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all.

John 3:16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

Rom. 8:32 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?

2 Cor. 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.

The mind set on the Spirit is the mind which is not focused on spiritual techniques, religious observance of foods and new moons, all of which are implemented by ourselves, but of Christ, who said at the cross, "it is finished" (John 19:28).

1 Cor. 1:26 For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. 27 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; 28 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, 29 that no flesh should glory in His presence. 30 But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption— 31 that, as it is written, “He who glories, let him glory in the LORD.”

Many confuse the works of the flesh with what the Bible teaches concerning the mind set on the flesh. We see so many examples of the truth of God's word today in the increasing failure of those in leadership in the Christian Church. And while we do not condemn the sinner for the sin, too often we go right back to pouring gasoline on the fire, and the results the Bible promises keep manifesting in our lives (Rom. 8:6; Gal. 6:7).

Gal. 5:16-21 I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, 20 idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, 21 envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Gal. 6:7 Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. 8 For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life.

Rom. 8:1-9 There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you.

2 Cor. 4:1-6 Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we do not lose heart. But we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. 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 bond servants for Jesus' sake. For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shown in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Luke 17:32 Remember Lot's wife.

Phil. 3:3-14 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.

Are you among those who have found the satisfaction of those who hunger for God's righteousness? Faith in Christ, not continuing to put faith in your ability to reach the connection with God that Adam lost in the fall, is the key. Your faith needs to be, not in that you can do better, but in that the work you thought you needed to do to reconnect with God is finished in Christ. If you will put all that you are on the foundation of His finished work, you will be able to build with gold that can be refined by fire, for all else, the works built on the old foundation, will be burned. Will you serve your flesh today? Or will you walk in the newness of life in Christ? Choose this day whom you will serve and do not be double minded.

Make Him your treasure, and you gain all things. Try to use Him to sustain that which should have gone to the cross, and you will perish when the winds and the waves remove that house which is built on sand. Jesus is the rock. Put your faith today on a connection God the Father offers through faith in His Son, and leave behind as rubbish all that that you had previously sought to build on the old foundation.