

Faith and Works XXI

The Contemporary and Biblical Contexts

Col. 2:8

True Food

Is life really all about who can live the longest with the most toys? We know that physically, in many ways, physically, psychologically, socially, we will die without them.

But Jesus taught that for those who would live in Him, in His kingdom that life more than food and the body more than clothing (Matt. 6:25, Luke 12:23).

The Bible makes a clear distinction between those who are seeking the things the "gentiles" seek, the loaves and the fishes, and those who truly are hungry and thirsting for God's righteousness.

John 6:35 And Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.

John 6:53-58 Then Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me. This is the bread which came down from heaven—not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever."

John 6:63 It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.

Some point to material success in this life as proof of their success in things of the Spirit. They are followed and supported (and made successful, sometimes with annual revenues in the hundreds of millions) by those who want to share in or

achieve the same success from themselves. If they fail, they will often secondarily seek to associate, and insure membership through donations typically, themselves with those they think are more successful than themselves, seeking vicarious blessings and success. It is the natural way of man-made religion.

Matt. 16:11 How is it you do not understand that I did not speak to you concerning bread?—but to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees."

Religion is man's efforts to make God his debtor, or to be as God himself, all on behalf of sustaining the fallen nature that is spiritually born dead to God, yet always with a need for Him, or failing that, some substitute to assure ourselves that we are rich and in need of nothing.

Money, riches, the praise of men, the pride of life, boasting in our own works, these are the things that choke the seed of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. These are the things that turn our attention away from our treasure in heaven, and instead fix our attention on our attempts to be satisfied by the number of goods we can store in our barns. So how is it that some fill meetings with those seeking these things, promising that Godliness is a means of great material gain, a short cut to the things the gentiles seek? Are they attracting people who are hungering and thirsting for God?

But some will ask, "are not those things good?" In themselves yes, but the Bible insists that it is the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus that gives true eternal life, and that the flesh profits nothing, and is certainly not to be the bases by which we perfect our spirit, and the mind that is set on the flesh and is a debtor to the needs of the flesh, will profit nothing. We cannot satisfy our longing for reunion with God by seeking to live on behalf of ourselves and whether or not we are able to keep the flesh satisfied in all the things that it covets.

The difference between being Christ centered and being self centered is not found in how much work we do for others, it is found in why we do what we do. If we are completing ourselves by our own actions, we can out of guilt or in search of self esteem be very busy at doing good works. But if we are finding ourselves by what we do, or how we look, or in search of the praise of other people, we are really still building on the old foundation.

All too often we do good deeds not out of gratitude for the gift we have received freely from God, but rather to earn more credit through our works. When we do good things, we are doing them for ourselves. Tithing, giving to God is now almost always taught this way, despite the clear difference to how Jesus Himself taught:

Luke 6:35-36 But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil. Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful.

Luke 14:12-14 Then He also said to him who invited Him, "When you give a dinner or a supper, do not ask your friends, your brothers, your relatives, nor rich neighbors, lest they also invite you back, and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just."

Scripture teaches that God does not supply our needs because He owes it to us based on what we have done, but because we are members of His family through faith in Christ, that when He is our treasure, and not the things the gentiles seek, we receive blessing not as rewards, but as natural provision from He who is our Father when we are born again and abide in His Son through faith.

Matt. 6:31-33 "Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For after all these things

the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you."

Seeking first His kingdom, abiding in Christ, is a matter of seeking our higher life in Him, no longer in ourselves.

They that seek the higher life will lose, not keep, gain or refurbish, not rebuild what they have once, if they profess Christ in word and baptism, destroyed which would only prove them transgressors, no, they will lose, let it go, not longer seek to be supported on it, no longer be self centered, but Christ centered with their attention fixed on Him, the treasure they seek found in Him. He becomes for the believer the Way, the Truth and the Life.

Those that seek to teach religion as a means of preserving, sustaining or improving the flesh, rather than seeking to preach Christ, teach the doctrines of men who seek to draw disciples to themselves, enticing them through their need for approval or material goods, and both are chained, through their need to satisfy the lower life, both are in darkness, and the gates of Hades remain firmly shut.

Abiding in Christ is far more than simply acknowledging that Jesus is Lord. The devils know this. No, if we believe through God's revelation that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God according to what is written in the Law and the Prophets, we will leave the comfort and support of our old foundation, and though the winds be boisterous, we will walk without support from this worlds means, the weak and elemental things of this world, an make Christ our foundation, fixing our eyes on Him, not ourselves, the author, perfecter and finisher of our faith who for the joy set before Him, despised the shame of the cross, it was not an offence to Him as it was to even His closest disciples.

Matt. 16:21-26 From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and

scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day. Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!" But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men." Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?"

For the old ship is indeed sinking, it will not be repaired. It is time to get into the life boat. All that is not on the foundation of Christ will be shaken. Those who do not have their roots in Him will be gathered at the last day and burned.

Some will ask, "Does it matter what we hear so long as we are comfortable with what we are hearing?"

Those with itching ears will "heap up" teachers to themselves, enslaved by their desires.

Matt. 15:12-14 Then His disciples came and said to Him, "Do You know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying?" But He answered and said, "Every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted. Let them alone. They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch."

Truth will burn in our hearts, a false truth will tickle our ears.

And where our treasure is, there will our heart be also.

If we turn to the Bible to find our own answers, it may be that a few verses can be "cherry picked" out of scripture and made to fit our own natural understanding. Yet

the true and complete message of God is not a collection of truths or doctrine, it is the message of our need for salvation, and Gods loving answer in Christ.

Our problem is not what we need, but what we are by nature based on what we inherited from Adam and the fall (Ephesians 2:3). The fall has left all shut up under sin. The law was to be our tutor to lead us to Christ, not the means to an end, namely our fulfilling in ourselves whatever it takes to bring our selves to God or to operate at His level on our own behalf, no, Christ is the end of the law to all who believe. For the sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law, for it is based on our efforts to fulfill it, based on ourselves building on the old foundation we inherited from Adam.

Matt. 23:25 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence.

Rom. 3:19-20 Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

Gal. 3:19-25 What purpose then does the law serve? It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator. Now a mediator does not mediate for one only, but God is one. Is the law then against the promises of God? Certainly not! For if there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the law. But the Scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed.

Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.

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

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."

Col. 2:11-14 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 uncircumcision 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.

Rom. 8:2-6 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.

Col. 2:16-23 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.

Col. 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.

2 Cor. 5:16-21 Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.