

# Faith and Works XXIII

*The Contemporary and Biblical Contexts*

Col. 2:8

# A Cup of Water

Matthew 10:42 And whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, assuredly, I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward.

When you give for what you will get, have you already received your reward, or are you working for and toward it? To be in the authority of Jesus, we must abide in Him or we can do nothing.

The scriptures say we are complete in Him. We work out our salvation in awe and reverence, knowing it is God who is at work in us to will and to do His good will. Jesus said the kings of the earth lord their authority over men, but it was not to be so among His disciples, that they should become servants of one another. Not becoming so focused on themselves that the people around them cease to bother them, but rather to be focused outward, to forgive because of the forgiveness they have received and rested in from God, to love their neighbor not to get a reward for acting nice, but to fulfill the essence of the Law in that he who is forgiven much, loves much, and so only in knowing our need to not to be found naked but to be clothed with Christ, we can love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, and love our neighbors as ourselves.

The moralistic therapeutic teachings that pass for "Biblical principles" taught instead of the gospel of Jesus Christ may indeed change habits and behavior, but while they often produce noticeable external improvements, they do not, and cannot deal with the root of the problem, the heart. What matters is a new creation, by faith leaving what we are behind to stand by faith in the finished work of Christ. We cannot be double minded about this as the first husband must die before one can be legally married to another.

If someone performs a duty out of self interest that duty may in itself be a good deed or action, but it is not love beyond self love that is the source for the

motivation. People may treat us better when we treat them well, but for the true Christian, self interest is never the motivation for they operate not from a need to improve themselves or gain favor or goods, for they are standing by faith in the completed work in Christ.

True love is not indifference to those who mistreat us due to our preoccupation with ourselves and our own journey, for Christ is the end of the law for those who believe in Him. Jesus wept along with those in pain. We are to love as a response to the love we have received from God when we accept the revelation of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

Being found complete in Him is the only way to use, as good stewards, the goods, talents and opportunities that have been placed at our disposal, on behalf of His Kingdom. Otherwise, seeking to complete ourselves, we will, by disposition of our fallen nature, seek to use His Kingdom on behalf of what we have.

Before God shed the light of the knowledge of God in Christ, we were alienated in mind, by nature children of wrath, at enmity to God and His ways for His law has condemned all men under sin. There is no appeasing Him for without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin, and until the sacrifice of God's perfect Lamb, there is no end to the need for atonement, the temple sacrifices continue daily even for the high priest serving in the Holy of Holies. Evidence for the fall is all around us, for the sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.

Man will seek God's righteousness, or seek to establish his own. Man seeks to find the right knowledge or religion and god or ascendant being to placate and appease through mans' own works, and beyond that, following the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, to become as God, and no longer need to depend on Him to hold all that we are together in Him and to be sustained by His spiritual eternal life.

Man deliberately suppresses the knowledge God has given of Himself in creation and in history through the descendants of Abraham, and through His inspired Word in the Law and the prophets record in the Bible, the revelation that hidden knowledge and religion will not make man right, and secure him the eternal life he seeks as an antidote to the fallen finite nature man has inherited from the event of the fall of his forefather and mother, Adam and Eve.

The end times that we were to watch for, not ignore, were typified by an attitude where godliness was seen as a means of great gain. Man since the fall seeks to be as God, not humble himself before Him seeking His mercy. Still eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil man seeks to control his existence by his own knowledge.

Today the popular teachings that scratch itching ears are made palatable by seasoning from scripture, but few seem to want to turn to the Word of God alone for the main meal.

The "Christianized" version of this that we see so prevalent today is the popular teachings that one must search through the Bible to find a sentence that agrees with one's own thoughts, and that by using that sentence as a focus of our own thoughts, we can concentrate on the thought until it is more real than our circumstances, and thus our minds will manifest from the spiritual into the physical what they have been focused on. Of course, if things are going wrong in the physical natural day to day reality of one's life, it is of course our own fault for not fully focusing on the good things we wish to experience and manifest. If we are not rich, it is our fault. If we are sick, we have not properly operated "faith".

Here the user seeks God to agree with their own desires. In a sense, if God has left a word or sentence in the Bible that can be used to articulate what we desire, He has enabled the mechanism for us to bless ourselves by our own faith.

The only difference from this structure of religious Gnosticism from the materialistic secular magicians, is that it requires a word or sentence from the Bible to prime it, otherwise, it is no different from the practice of those following the Gnostic principles recently popularized in bestselling books such as "The Secret" and "A Course in Miracles".

There was a time when the church of Christ was a light on a hill, due to the fact that it reflected the glory of God in the face of Christ. It acknowledged our need for a savior, and recognized that God was in Christ, not counting man's sins against him, making Christ, who knew no sin, to be sin on our behalf, that we might become through faith and rest in His work, the righteousness of God in Christ. He was to be our clothing, our foundation, a treasure of such great worth that we would gladly empty our hands of all that we hold in this life to receive His rich inheritance.

That is the case no longer, as the church has become a reflection of the world. While once the church was to be the body of Christ, it is now a congregation of those seeking their lower life, not coming together in the mystical body of believers of those who are resting in and focused on Christ. There was a time when the church was the salt of the Earth, yet now what passes for the church is a primary transmitter of the disease Narcissism that is infecting the world with ever increasing effectiveness.

Each Sunday, in front of thousands of listeners, speakers teach what they "feel" God has told them, a message that usually more often than not follows the pattern: I-I-I-ME-ME-ME-ME-YOU-YOU-YOU-DO-DO-DO-DO. If there is room at the end of these messages for an alter call that actually mentions the need for Jesus, it is offered as a chance to join the temple of the self and proceed on the journey to learn how to get the things we need to live our best life now.

Those marketing faith as a system that God has established, like gravity, will also be quick to include another law or mechanism that God supposedly made available

for those who learn to operate it. That of sowing and reaping. Giving to get. Doing to become. Operating faith to exercises our will over our environment.

Their wealth and success is not due to their faith or God, it comes from those following them who are seeking to learn from them how to use their faith like God.

In the commercial realm of religion, Faith becomes something we do, mental assertion, God only being supposed to enable the mechanism, rather than faith being rest and trust in God. Those who claim to know the techniques, and promise to teach us how to have similar success as they do. Their success being a great following of those with itching ears and financial riches from those seeking to become rich by donating to their organizations, prospering from those buying and donating to their ministries seeking to share in their anointing. These leaders of religious businesses are seeking a captive audience, not teaching the truth of the Gospel that sets the captives free. That is not a message one needs twenty DVDs or expensive seminars to learn, for a child is given the pure milk of God's word can enter the Kingdom of heaven freely.

Abraham was not operating faith when he sought to sacrifice his son. He was not practicing sowing a child to reap a hundred children. He was prepared to give up his most precious possession while trusting in God who had already sworn by Himself, that Abraham would be the father of many nations.

But when one seeks confirmation from the testimony of the Bible, one finds that those in the desert were not in faith, not because they were not striking all the rocks whenever they felt hungry, no, they were not in faith because they were not trusting God.

This was the very action the devil was trying to tempt Jesus into when he challenged Jesus in the wilderness to change the stones into bread. If He, Jesus, was the Son of God, why then, was He hungry? Yet it was the Spirit of God that

had led Jesus into the wilderness. He had food that most do not know of. It is the spirit that gives life, the spirit of life in Christ Jesus, the flesh profits nothing.

This is the same yeast, that of focusing on the self and its progress rather than the finished work of Christ, that has now permeated the world church, and now seeks to do the devils work by pointing at those who are not rich in the things of this world and condemning their faith in Christ.

Yet in James, this attitude is said to be the actual evidence of those who are double minded, serving two masters, giving honor to those who possess material wealth, rather than recognizing that God has made those who are poor in the things of this world, to be rich in faith, always ready to give a reason for the hope that is in them, as they look and place their faith in their treasures in heaven in Christ as an anchor that goes beyond the veil of the temporal things of this world, the things we can store in our barns and too often seek false comfort in. They are complete not in their temporal circumstances, but rather, by faith, are seeing themselves seated in Christ at the right hand of God, in one of the many dwelling places Christ said He would prepare for this who would rest in and abide in Him.

Those in the desert were not in faith, not because they were not striking all the rocks whenever they felt hungry, rather, they were not in faith because they were not trusting God to provide for their daily needs. This was the very action the devil was trying to tempt Jesus into when he challenged Jesus in the wilderness to change the stones into bread.

We are told in the Gospels to seek first His kingdom, than all those things we need while carrying out His works we are to do in fulfilling His commission to be His ambassadors, would be added to us.

Luke makes it a point to tell us that Simon was revered by the local community who considered him powerful in the things of God. Simon was rebuked by the disciples for being in the gall of bitterness because he sought spiritual ability as a

means of increasing his personal status among those doing God's work through the power of the Holy Spirit.

In the true Church members are not evaluated based on what they do or possess, or by outward appearance, rather they are valued as members together of Christ Himself.

The Bible teaches that the Holy Spirit gives gifts as He wills, not so we can build ourselves up, but for the purpose of building up the body of Christ where there is no longer distinctions based on the outward appearance or material value, that we are together clothed and one in Him.

Galatians 3:26-28 You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

If we derive our self esteem from the role we play in front of people or at the local religious community center, we are building ourselves on our own foundation. If we love to improve ourselves or gain merit to our own account, rather than love because of the loved we have received from God in His gift of eternal life in Christ, we have gained nothing.

Our works are not to make us. If they do, we show that we are still at work building on the old foundation, the sand and not the rock of Christ. All that is on the old foundation will be shaken, and that which is built on the new foundation, Christ, will have its gold purified by fire.

Our status, our foundation, who we are and those fellow members with us in the body of Christ, if we are in faith, is who we are in Jesus, clothed in Him.

John 13:13-17 You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also

ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.

The gospel of the Kingdom of God, is based on the principle that we are resting in the finished work of the Lamb of God, for without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sins. Jesus is the lamb slain before the foundation of the world. We were chosen by God in Christ before we were formed in our mother's womb, even before the fall.

Let us fear lest a promise remains of this rest that we have failed to rest in, seeking first to Abide in Christ, seeking to be in the Kingdom of God's Son, and trusting all else, those things the gentiles seek, to be added to us.

When we give even a cup of water in His name, we should not do so to make ourselves appear loving, but truly out of love for those around us.

1 John 4:7-11 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

Amen.