

Faith and Works XXIX

The Contemporary and Biblical Contexts

Col. 2:8

Peddlers

2 Cor. 2:14-17 Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place. For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life. And who is sufficient for these things? For we are not, as so many, peddling the word of God; but as of sincerity, but as from God, we speak in the sight of God in Christ.

And so how does one "peddle" the Word of God, and to whom?

They who peddle the word of God are those who are personally profiting from selling knowledge, sometimes secret knowledge that supposedly they have themselves been the only ones to discover, the hidden secrets of passages of scripture that everyone else missed, but which they claim are the missing secrets that if the believers of today will but learn them will then equip, enable and empower believers to become everything God "intended" when He made man "in His image" as is written in the book of Genesis.

And so, through the spiritual power they achieve by following these teachings, they will then be able to usher in the fullness that has been missing in creation, drawing all those in darkness by the brightness of their personal light.

The key here is that the peddlers are offering something, a teaching product, that we can learn to do to better ourselves, because we can do it if we only know what it is we need to do and apply ourselves to it. What is typically missing is a clear presentation of the Gospel, such as a child could understand, of who we can be in Christ through faith in His finished work.

And it should be noticed that the issues that are being addressed, such as guilt, the need of finances, healing, finding a sense of self worth and purpose in a seemingly

random, meaningless and indifferent universe, all these are issues that are common to all men, not just those in a particular religious practice or faith. They are the common things that the gentiles are seeking answers for.

Matthew 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.

The case can be made that today the Church is largely irrelevant in challenging the world with the Word of God simply because it seeks to utilize only parts of the Bible mixed with ideas from the non Christian world in an attempt to provide ways to equip people to be successful according to the world's current definition of success in the current world system. It's a practical Gospel, rather than the eternal Gospel.

But are these the issues, one at a time, that are indeed addressed individually by the message of the Gospel, or is there a deeper root issue that the Gospel first addresses to correct all the things that are affected as a consequence?

Is the Gospel a series of teachings that we apply as needed until we have perfected ourselves? Or could it be that the root issue that the Bible addresses is the one we should focus on?

There are those who realize they are poor in spirit, who hunger for God and His righteousness. They are not those content in themselves, at peace with the place they have made for themselves in the world of men. No, these are those who are seeking a city whose builder and foundation is God.

We will need a sharp axe, not just to prune and snip a few branches, but to cut to the root of the tree, as John the Baptist admonished those who came to hear him

preach in the wilderness. We study what God has said to sharpen our swords so that we might cut between soul and spirit, bone and flesh.

How has He spoken to us? Through Jesus Christ according to Hebrews 1:1. Has He told us all things, for instance, how He created the universe? No, we don't need to know that unless we are still in the mindset mankind was tricked into in the Garden when we by our own knowledge sought to become as God and sustain ourselves rather than continue to rely on fellowship and union with the Creator.

Our tendency to use our natural mindset in this area is why we so often miss the point of what Paul is saying in 1 Corinthians 1:30 where he speaks of how Christ has become our righteousness, sanctification, redemption and wisdom. The point isn't that we now know everything God knows, rather the point is that by knowing and having faith in Christ, through Him we are literally complete in Him (Colossians 2:10), in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

Too often this verse is just used to make the limited point that we can be led on a daily bases by the leading and direction of the Holy Spirit. But that is not so that we can know everything and thus operate as God on the bases of the knowledge we posses, rather, Jesus said the Holy Spirit would reveal Himself and all that He is to us, and we are to abide in Him, not try to be like Him with whatever supernatural aid we think we can muster up by our own knowledge and effort. We can only operate in His authority, and as ambassadors on His behalf, when we abide in Him, and indeed, are verily clothed with Him.

We remain in our physical selves, as Paul and Peter often maintained to those who were witnesses of the miracles that God did through them as they proclaimed the Gospel. The power is not of us. Until we see ourselves in Him, and not evaluate ourselves on the bases of what we are in ourselves, we will only be speaking out of our own authority, and not that of a member of the body of Christ. The sin of Simon was to seek spiritual power as a technique that he could use to his own credit, to build up his own reputation and status before men. Yet this motivation is

often proclaimed as the very reason the new modern teachings should be accepted, as following the modern marketing methods, we are told we are to seek a following of signs and wonders, principally in the realm of establishing fulfillment for the things the gentiles seek.

When we seek faith to better our control and power to build ourselves up, we miss the faith of the Gospel. When we seek faith that we may do all things through Christ, the pre-requisite is that we first reckon ourselves in the natural crucified with Christ, and who we are in the unseen is members of Christ, seated "above" in Him (Col. 3:1).

The scriptures say Christ is our life, not our life coach for how to be successful in this world. He is not revealed in these last days so that we can change our behavior, He is here that we might change the bases of who we are, our very natures, by being born again in Him. He is looking for fruit from a changed heart, not works from a determined self seeking will.

2 Cor. 12:7-10 And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

True Biblical faith results in a change of our experience and knowledge of ourselves in this world. We cannot seek faith as a pragmatic tool to reinforce what we have inherited since the fall of man in Adam, attempting to build on ourselves as a foundation for who and what we are, without in our hearts being those who

find the true Biblical message of the Gospel an offence. Remember, the Gospel is only good news to those who are seeking Gods righteousness instead of their own.

We seem to think in our natural mindset that God wants us to learn to operate as He does, rather than trust in His operation on our behalf. We have believed that idea since the day Adam fell in the garden. And so we seek teachings to tell us how to operate faith, thinking Godliness is a means of great gain. Jesus of course, if He is considered in these sort of teachings at all, is usually presented in the role of teacher, or an example of how we can ourselves operate God's laws and principles of spiritual power. The attention is never on Christ, He is not lifted up, rather the focus is on us and on the success we can achieve following the current teaching.

And so, in need, we often seek someone to lead the way, show us how to correctly operate faith to gain supernatural power over our circumstances.

Guilt comes in here, because if it is assumed this is all something one can learn to do right, and the example of doing it right is all the success the salesman of the particular religious faith teaching, should we not be able to measure ourselves to that standard, then we are doing something wrong, we are not operating faith correctly, or worse, we are sinning, perhaps not tithing enough, or being critical, especially when it comes to questioning the claims of the salesman, and thus we are responsible for canceling out the effectiveness of correctly operating the teaching.

Pride also comes to those whose circumstances are pleasant and who then credit themselves with controlling their destiny.

We need to ask ourselves, are we taking every thought captive to be obedient to the knowledge of Christ (2 Cor. 10:5), or are we ourselves trying to control our own thinking believing that what we ourselves think influences and determines our environment? One attitude is of the faith once delivered by the saints, one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism, and the other, that which we embarked on at the fall in the

garden, that of becoming as God, no longer relying on Him, choosing to depend on our own actions based on our own knowledge. But the promise of the Gospel is far richer than that that we could grasp and hold by the actions of our own efforts.

Galatians 3:26-29 For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. 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. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Imagine being in a fellowship of people who accepted you based on your being a member of the body of Christ, and not by how you measured up to their cultural or religious standards.

Such is lost when the Gospel is presented as another gospel, one that only provides the self with a set of tools to perfect itself.

Those who are less inclined to the herd mentality of the sheep might pause to ask if a salesman is successful because what he or she says about a product is true, or are they successful because they can convince people that what they are saying about the product is true? We seem to be easily persuaded that if a ministry is successful in marketing itself and able to draw a lot of interest to itself that this is a miracle of God.

The ironic side of this is these teachers usually point to their own success to prove their teachings work. But it is not the teachers faith or favor with God that makes them successful and wealthy, it's the people who are trying to get rich by following their teachings who are the ones making them rich.

This God that the salesmen of faith teach is behind all this is said to be the sort who after leaving instructions on what we must do, is now helpless or unwilling to become personally involved in the lives of those seeking truth, that it is now up to

them to operate the given faith principles as even He Himself does. The reason being, that the more successful we become here in this life, the more people will come to realize that God's ways are higher than our ways, and that if they too want to be as successful as we, then they too will follow the teachings, available for a discount if one purchases them in bulk from the current commercial religious manufacturer of the latest teaching product.

Thus the more successful we are at becoming like God, the more we can achieve, the better the rest of the world that is seeking similar success will be able to see the superiority of God's instructions.

So we follow teachings that tell us how to modify our behavior, change our thinking, begin speaking and focusing on what we are seeking to see manifested in our lives. We can have what we say of course, only if what we are saying is in agreement with God's word, so even here there is a whole market available for those who can show that God's intention is for us to have our best life now, and can find scriptures to back that up. And so there are many teachings available today that will demonstrate that God wants mankind to be rich and in need of nothing.

Some even go so far as to say that there are really no diseases, because God would not make a disease, and that they only exist because we have not renewed our mind from erroneously believing in their existence in the first place. And from the Unity school of Christianity along with what is left of the Christian Science denomination, we hear a hearty "Amen". Those in the mind sciences not directly tainted by any allusion to the Bible by cloaking the philosophy in Biblical terminology simple say "That's truth".

Of course, disease must be real in some sense if the scriptures speak of Jesus carrying our infirmities and bearing our sicknesses. The fallen state of nature may not have been God's best plan for creation, but it is real enough that God intends to finally do away with it and make a new one for those rejoined to Him in spirit and in truth though faith and union with Christ.

And so we see that, by placing our hope in operating faith as if it was an object in itself, rather than faith being the action of placing trust and dependence in some other object, the water usually gets a bit muddy between Biblical and non-Biblical faith, as there is usually a constant shifting of perspective.

One minute we are operating God's laws, the next, we are operating the same laws, such as speaking things into existence, that God Himself is said to have used when for instance, in Genesis he is said to have "spoken" creation into existence. This has often been pared with a really unique reading of Hebrews 11:3 to suggest the order of the words intended us all along to understand that God Himself operates by the same law of faith as we can, if we just learn to operate faith correctly. So faith is in a Gnostic sense considered as an object, where as in the true Biblical sense, faith is not a thing in itself, it is the action of trust in something, Jesus.

Yet to say that God creates by only speaking words in faith would be to miss the complete council of the Bible, for in many places it clearly says that what God spoke came to pass because His own arm made it happen, that He created by Himself, and that there is no other creator besides Himself.

In the Bible, Jesus Himself is said to be where we should fix our eyes, as He is the author, perfecter and finisher of our faith. But in Gnostic based teachings, the attention is drawn from Jesus to a focus and preoccupation with how well the individual is operating, confessing, meditating, whatever, on the things they want to see come to pass in their daily experience, and of course, until they see those things, they need to continually work at building up their faith, staying completely focused on what they are seeking. If one is sick, lacking in wealth and success, it is because they are not operating faith correctly, they need to get the latest teachings, and begin practicing them in order to see results. This we are told, is what God wants us to know. This is the Gospel of those who are marketing faith and Godliness as a means of gain for fallen man in this world.

Unfortunately, there is gold in 'them thar' hills, great money to be made by drawing the attention of those who are seeking. There is an unconscious consensus among those raised on Star-Wars and Harry Potter, and indirectly influenced by the incursion of mind science teachings into main stream commercial religious teachings, and so we have many people telling us what they feel we need to know about what the Bible has to say, yet few of those seem willing to let the Bible speak for itself.

Jesus would probably today not have a popular hit media ministry, as all of the current popular ministries claim miracles and changed lives. But the message of Jesus, as recorded in the Bible itself, and not misrepresented in the modern context of non-Biblical teachings, would likely offend, as it always has, those seeking not to be freed from the death of the first husband, but instead to reform him and dress him up.

We are by nature, until the real law of God brings us to an end of our confidence in ourselves, seeking faith to aid us in a make-over for our first husband. All our attention is on him and his needs. We miss the part in the Bible where we are told that that the only way to be legally married to another, from God's point of view anyway, is if the first husband dies.

For instance, most people today, if they consider Jesus at all, will seek Him for the loaves and the fishes, as they did when He was physically here on earth teaching and doing miracles. But apparently Jesus was not up to speed with the current best practices in marketing a message that people want to hear, and in fact, Jesus not only succeeds in driving away the crowds whom He had just miraculously fed, but He says things that offend many of His own disciples who leave Him as well.

He was not there to demonstrate how to work miracles. The miracles were taking place to demonstrate why He was there.

For instance, in Mark 11, just after Jesus has fulfilled the prophecy of Daniel and made His Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem where He finally publicly accepts the title of Messiah, the next event we read about is where Jesus curses the fig tree. And so, everyone in the room focuses on the tree, which withers from the root within a single day, and wants to know, "how did he do that, and how can we learn to do that too?" Such is orientation of our mind, seeking power. One might have asked how one might heal rather than destroy, but here again, we see the natural orientation of man missing what God is showing us. We, like Jonah, would rather call fire down on those contrary to our set purposes. But what was the issue that Jesus was illustrating?

The fig tree represented Israel and the system of Moses by which they sought to establish their righteousness, even to the rejecting of the offer of grace and salvation God was making in giving His Son as a final offering for the sins of the world. They were those for whom Jesus had first come in answer to God's promises in the Law and the Prophets. Those who thought they were successful in their religious practices, in need of nothing, seeking only how to continue in their unacknowledged fallen condition which all shared in for there is none righteous, not one. The scriptures teach that by the works of the Law, no flesh could be justified. There was always the continual need for sacrifices to be made at the Temple, until the perfect Lamb of God could be given for the sins of the whole world.

And so Jesus laments, that if Israel had only known this day, the very day He had fulfilled prophecy by riding into Jerusalem as Messiah, they would have been spared what would soon befall the city when it would be destroyed, not one stone of the Temple left on the mount, by Titus in 70 AD. He had longed to gather them under His grace, as a hen gathers her chicks He said, but they had rejected Him, trusting in their own righteousness which was by the works of the Law.

And so Jesus demonstrated with a miracle that the system of man becoming as God by his own works, or trying to restore his nature to stand before God on the bases

of man's own works, this system, was now at an end, it would be condemned in Himself, the Temple veil would be torn in two, but He alone would be the door, the way was now made open through Him, but no man could come unto the Father, but through Him.

And so His disciples sought to know how to curse fig trees, and asked that Jesus teach them how to increase their faith.

But faith is not a substance that can be increased as is taught in the modern Gnostic context. That is why Jesus says, if one had faith as a grain of mustard seed, one could say to this mountain, and He was standing before the Temple mount when He said this, it would be thrown into the sea. In Isaiah, God speaks of one day when He would throw our sins into the sea of forgetfulness.

The old order of works, of seeking to change ourselves by our own knowledge of good and evil was to come to an end. Mankind had failed to do it. The law was given to show man his need for a savior, not give him the means to change his own nature. The new birth was to be born again in Christ, leaving the old behind, taken up by Jesus Himself and crucified with Him. How dare we take it back from His cross and seek once again to turn back to the weak and worthless elemental things of this world which have an appearance of wisdom in harsh treatment of the body, or secret wisdom or techniques on prayer and fasting, but which have no value against the flesh for it is all activity based on what the flesh accomplishes on its own.

And so our faith was to be on who Jesus is, on our being in Him, He being the foundation of all we are, not our works, not the outward appearance of the earthen vessel, but clothed in Christ, members of His body, unified not by ourselves, but by participation in the divine nature through faith in Christ. It is not faith in miracles, not increasing our ability to operate faith that we need.

John 11:17-27 So when Jesus came, He found that he had already been in the tomb four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles away. And many of the Jews had joined the women around Martha and Mary, to comfort them concerning their brother.

Now Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met Him, but Mary was sitting in the house. Now Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You."

Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again."

Martha said to Him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?"

She said to Him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world."

Jesus told Martha her faith was not to be in raising the dead, but in Himself, He was the resurrection and the Life. Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life. How can we turn away from abiding in Him to once again seek to base our existence on our own fallen nature? As long as we seek to rebuild what we once destroyed, we will be transgressors the Bible says. We are to fear lest we have not by faith entered the rest from our own works, from building on the old foundation. All things are to be shaken, all that is on sand will be washed away. And that which is built on the rock will be tested by fire to purify the gold, all the wood hay and stubble will be burned away.

The centurion was said to have great faith because he trusted in the authority of Jesus, not because he believed all things were possible. Peter walked on the water because he had faith in Jesus, that if it was Jesus and Jesus commanded him to walk on water, than he could do so. When the fierce wind and waves distracted his attention from Jesus, then he sank. Those in Jesus's home town limited Jesus not because they didn't want to see the lame walk, the blind see, and demons cast out. They just were unable to accept the testimony of the miracles that were being done as a witness of the role of Jesus as Messiah.

What must we do that we may do the works of God? What are we seeking and why? Are we truly seeking first His Kingdom, His righteousness? Are we Abiding in Him, or striving to be like Him?

When we fail to take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ, we fall back into our carnal thinking, and once again begin building on the old foundation, our mind on the flesh because as our foundation of what we are before God, we are once again a debtor to it, and must seek its comfort, its well being, and when others exceed our own achievements, we have enmity and strife and every bitter work of the flesh as it strives to be the best by comparing itself to those around it.

God is not to be mocked, for behind the makeup, lights and music, those who market themselves and seek to draw others to themselves in the name of God are reaping corruption becoming consumed with self and the cares of this world.

True faith does not need to be marketed as a product containing the latest insights and techniques. A child can do it.

John 6:26-29 Jesus answered them and said, "Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him."

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."

Matthew 6:19-21 "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

John 16:33 These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

2 Cor. 4:16-18 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.

Matthew 6:25-33 "Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature?

"So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even

Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?

"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.

Matthew 13:44 "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field."

Phil. 3:12-14 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.

Amen