

Faith and Works XXVI

The Contemporary and Biblical Contexts

Col. 2:8

In and Out

Historically, and especially in our own day, man's religious practices and ideas tend to center around three types of beliefs. It is up to us to save ourselves, to become spiritual or pure by our own works. God helps us save ourselves, and the last, which is uniquely the New Testament view, that God saves those who put their faith in Christ, and that faith will result in the fruit of love and forgiveness that God seeks.

To believe that we can perfect ourselves to redemption or salvation would not be a biblical position due to its refusal to acknowledge that it is the fall of man through Adam that has resulted in generations who by nature are children of wrath, that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, that through the law comes the knowledge of sin, and that the law was never made for a righteous individual, its very application is an admission of a non righteous condition by nature.

Some people say we should be doing more. Some teach we should be doing less. They are all mostly teaching that we should be doing something. But they are usually starting on the wrong side of the cross, they are not seeking to work out their salvation, they are still trying to work towards it. Each new teacher is promising they know what to do to do the works of God, and a lot of them are getting very wealthy promising they have the newest insight and revelation into how to "work" faith and spiritual laws. They never stop to listen to the answer that Jesus gave when asked this question.

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."

Those who are focused on what they need to do are focused not on Jesus, but on themselves and building on the old foundation, and not the new. Some do works to get, some do works out of gratitude for what they have received. Some are in

Christ, some are still outside, not abiding in Him. Those who are still depending on what they do to gain God's favor do so never feeling they have done enough, for indeed, by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified. The inner knowledge of the failure of our works produces guilt, which becomes a tool for manipulation be those seeking to draw people after themselves.

Furthermore, those who would draw disciples away unto themselves fulfill prophecy, but not in a good way.

Acts 20:29-31 For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.

Typically those seeking to be teachers of Gods laws, whether they seek to teach what one should do to become more righteous, or spiritual, or both, will teach faith as a work, and confuse or completely misunderstand what James is teaching when he writes in the New Testament, that "faith without works is dead".

The seeking after this or that teacher was dealt with by Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians, though sadly, with all the commercial religious media being broadcast, as a recent Pew study shows few of those who call themselves "Evangelical" or even "Christian" can define even the basic tenets of the faith once delivered to the saints.

And while many have decried the commercialization of Christian holidays in the secular world and seek to keep Christ in Christmas, few even understand why his absence as the Biblical Christ, and His replacement with a life coach within the modern commercial church is prophetically significant. After all, they might now say, are we not all just seeking to find the best way to live as God intended?

But in the Bible, God is not answering those who seek their best life now, He is answering those who have come to the end of this world and what it has to offer, and now seek Him and His righteousness. Yet as the plain text of the Bible seems to come short of what people are in the main seeking these days, new ways of interpreting the Bible are being invented in order to find the kind of answers people are seeking to aid them in continuing to build on their first foundation.

The revelation of the Holy Spirit was not traditionally taught as a personal spiritualist interpretation of verses from the Bible, rather He was revealing the Truth, Jesus, Himself the Way, the Truth and the life.

Traditionally it was taught, even in scripture, that the Holy Spirit would reveal the truth of God in Christ, to which the law and the prophets, the scriptures, testified. This is why the Bereans could search the scriptures to verify what Paul was preaching to them. It was not the subjective or mystical meaning of the scriptures, rather the confirmation of the truth of what Paul had testified. Christ is the mystery only revealed in these last days, the period of time between the 69 and 70 week of God's prophetic time line revealed to Daniel. Now is the day of salvation, the time when men are free to choose life, before the coming judgment of God and His wrath, a time for men to turn to him in repentance from dead works, and faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ, Himself being the end of the law for all who believe.

There was a time when one could be burned at the stake for possessing a copy of the Bible in the common tongue, in a language that the average man or women could understand. We can be sure that anyone possessing such a book would not treat it casually, but would carefully read it knowing they would have to decide if the truths written in the book were worth the price of their very lives.

The Devil obviously did not like people reading God's word for themselves. In the garden it was his subtle manipulation of what God had said that was used to convince Eve to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The Devil would

rather people listen to him concerning the things of God, rather than heed what God has said in His unchanging inspired written Word, the Bible. We must never listen to a speaker and assume that if the scriptures he or she has sprinkled like seasoning in their message seems to fit what they are saying that what they are saying must be of God, for in reality, it is really a matter of asking if what one is hearing is in agreement with the proper context of the scriptures, not the other way around.

But today just having a Bible for some is a common thing, and too often we assume that because we have a copy, or even many copies on our shelves, that we possess and have received its truth.

Too often the Bible is cut up into individual verses which we then use to make our own jigsaw puzzle picture. We use the pieces that fit what we want to see, and discard the rest, replacing them with our own thoughts and ideas, or the teachings of those who tickle our ears. We cannibalize God's Word rather than humbling ourselves before it.

Many today claim to be hearing God speak when the sword of the spirit is so dull that there is no ability to discern between soul and spirit, bone and flesh, rather, if a word or teaching from someone feels good to us (not if it lines up with the whole council of God's Word) we then believe God has spoken. Too often it is merely our own alter ego, that mechanism that writers use to hear their fictional characters speak as they write their stories, that is bouncing back echoes of all that we have filled our hearts and minds within our search for own interpretation of truth.

Some are today claiming they are in the business of "chasing god", that they have a head start on the rest of us, and to get up to speed, they offer us new revelations and teachings which they hope will cause many to chase after them with their attention and money. They say they are seeking a "Now" word, and consider the Bible to be a "dusty old love letter" or even, "moldy old bread".

Instead of seeking Jesus who is the same yesterday, today and forever, they are seeking a god of immediate experience that they can possess for themselves. The point is, they are seeking to improve themselves and how they feel by their experiences. The god they are ultimately chasing is themselves, decedents of those who choose to seek by their own knowledge to be as God, separating themselves from the true life of God, yet believing the lie that they could keep themselves alive by becoming as gods themselves.

The commercial religious media is filled with those seeking to sell their faith teachings, pointing to their own wealth and success as proof that they offer spiritual truths. This has brought financial success to many who understand how to market themselves to those seeking spiritual remedies to their circumstances. We should be wary, however, from gauging the success of a teaching based on how wealthy someone has become selling those teachings to those who seek to learn faith. Such success is not necessarily miraculous, just good marketing.

And as faith is now seen as a tool to achieve success in this life according to societies definition of success, not God's, ones circumstances become an indicator for measuring how successfully we are operating the tools of faith. Therefore many are content not by their relationship to God in Christ, but by His relationship to their works. It is done to aid and continue to successfully build on the old foundation.

But we are not to walk by sight, but by faith, which often means we must walk in spite of our circumstances, in hope despite what we might see with our physical eyes, for the eyes of true Biblical faith look on the unseen.

John 14:1-2 "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.

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."

James 1:2-8 My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

Phil. 4:12-13 I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

2 Cor. 5:1-8 For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven, if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked. For we who are in this tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life. Now He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.

So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. For we walk by faith, not by sight. We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.

It is said that he who defines the terms, wins the argument. The argument the Devil is always having with us is, if we are children of God, why can't we turn these stones to bread? The contrast is always that the spirit gives life, the spirit of life in Christ Jesus, and that the flesh profits nothing. Until we learn to abide in Christ, our works will primarily be focused on how to earn continuance and support for building on our old foundation.

Though some are mixing a Gnostic definition of the realm of spirit and that of the world we daily experience it is very hard to re-define the Kingdom of God as simply a repository of the perfect realm that we must access by faith in order to manifest its contents in the realm of our daily experience. For while we may insist that our treasures are in heaven in order to agree with scripture, yet if those treasures are sought for their utility in meeting our goal for sustaining and improving our daily existence, their true value to us is in improving our lot in this kingdom. For in this mindset, the focus is still on paying off the debt of the flesh on which we are depending, whether it be to become more righteous, or simply to live in as much pleasure and comfort as possible.

Col. 3: 1-7 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...

Romans 8:5-6 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.

Gal. 5:16-26 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. 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, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, 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. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

And here are the signs of a mind set on the flesh, in other words, when the preoccupation is with improving or bettering one's self away from where one is now, to a destination where one will be better, more complete. How we measure our progress is by measuring ourselves by ourselves.

This is where envy, greed, and un-forgiveness breed, though if one of our standards of good works is never appearing to be in any of those states, there are plenty of passive ways we usually find to achieve the same goal. This is where religious hypocrisy comes in. It is not being religious per se, but appearing to be above the brutal level of only feeling at peace with ourselves when we compare ourselves to those we judge not as far along as us. And not surprisingly, although 99 percent of the world's religions work along these levels, true Biblical Christianity does not.

For focusing on ourselves and depending on our own works for our righteousness, will always create the opposite. If there are others more successful than ourselves, we will envy them and secretly rejoice when they fall. If we feel we have exceeded those around us in our works, there will be contempt and animosity toward those we judge to be lower than ourselves.

And for insurance, just so we never fall below a certain level, we often will single out at group of people who we will always disqualify due to their race, religion or politics. It is the mechanism God's word speaks about when it talks about the works of the flesh being the result of the mind set on the flesh.

This is why true Christian fellowship when practiced and experienced is so completely different to the ways people usually find to be included within a given social or religious group. And the gifts of the Holy Spirit were not to be sought, as did Simon, for personal gain or to enhance our own reputation, but rather for the edification of the body of Christ, that all are one in Christ. Without Jesus lifted up as the head, higher than ourselves, we revert to our natural tendency to view religion and our relations with each other according to the carnal mind.

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.

Eph. 4:9-16 (Now this, "He ascended"—what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.) And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ— from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

The fruit of the Spirit is a response of love and grace in the manner we have received. The works of the flesh will always be geared toward competition with ourselves, the world, and ultimately, even God, for when we seek to please a God who will not love us until we improve our qualify ourselves, we are in competition with Him, seeking to force Him to begrudgingly accept those who have payed the price of works and religious devotion in the name of self preservation.

Man seeks the way to make himself right, while God points to His Son and declares that He is the Way, the Truth and the Life and that no one can come to the Father but by Him. When the evidence of carnal thinking is evident in our lives, often, in the Christian way, the problem is not what we are doing, but why we are

doing it. Have we fallen into the trap of seeking our own way, depending on our own works, seeking a kingdom built on ourselves as a foundation? This is not the easy yoke, the light burden that Jesus spoke of.

Let us again hear the answers of Jesus to the question all have asked since the separation of God and man in the garden and our endless search to save ourselves from the darkness of the fall by our own works:

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."

Are we in or are we out? What kind of works are we doing and why?

John 15: 1-8 "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples."

Amen