

Faith and Works XXVIII

The Contemporary and Biblical Contexts

Col. 2:8

What is Old is New

There are those who profess to be teachers within the loose definition of "Christian" who are routinely cannibalizing the Bible to find topics which they then turn into products that they can use to market and support their ministries, claiming they have discovered the next new teaching that will aid and equip those seeking to learn how to be Christians.

These products are teachings of individual truths in scripture that have been disconnected from the Gospel, and are sold as standalone teachings, one after the other, that those seeking to improve their religious experience can use to change or improve their behavior. The list of topics is never ending, but typically are distilled from the New Testament, rather than the Law or the Prophets, and usually try to make the teachings of Jesus a new set of laws by which if one follows them, they will enter into God's favor, or even attain for themselves supernatural power over their circumstances.

The typical formula for the presentation of these teachings is to first point out a truth in scripture, such as one should not covet, or be in offence or un-forgiveness, followed by a discussing on how the one can fall under the temptation even without knowing it. It just might be the reason some are not experiencing pleasing circumstances or success in their lives, and a connection is suggested as to the quality of their faith and the tribulation they may or may not be experiencing in this world. So the audience is then challenged to examine themselves to see if they are lacking in any success, and if they have fallen short of the law or truth currently being discussed. The speaker then typically goes into a long story about how they too once needed to learn how to overcome this particular temptation, followed by glowing testimonies about the blessings they experienced, typically of rewards of goods and a claim to having received their current "divinely" appointed status of teacher based on their success in overcoming the problem being discussed, the problem of failing to meet the requirements of a particular scriptural truth being presented as a law we must follow in order to achieve success.

The first thing to notice is that these teachings are disconnected from the Gospel and presented as standalone topics. So if an individual is having trouble in their life, they are perhaps in need of physical healing, financial help, help with relationships, or maybe they are just tired of being the tail on the dog, there are religious book stores, calling themselves Christian, that are full of advice on how to correct the particular weakness that is responsible. Some may recognize they have a problem with anger, others with lust, others with forgiving others or being jealous or offended with those around them. For each and every issue one can find a teaching, a book, a DVD, that will show how to correct that particular issue, and of course the product line continues to expand as more issues are being discovered every day and solutions packaged and marketed to deal with them.

Far too many of us have become complacent concerning the Word of God, not appreciating the lives and effort that have been spent that we might have the scriptures in our own language on our book shelves, and often we pick up our Bibles and sort through them looking for scriptures that sound like they are saying what we think we already know, rather than reading all of God's Word and understanding their meaning in the context of the Bible. The Bible is not vague about what it teaches, but what it teaches is often so different from what man on his own would conceive, that without the light of Christ, the meaning of scripture is often hidden due to the radical difference in what it presents as opposed to the religious concepts of the natural unregenerate mind.

The Bible, when it speaks for itself in its full council, and not when it has been sliced and diced and sprinkled as seasoning in the context of someone else's notion of religious practice, says that there are those who are always learning, but never coming to a knowledge of the truth. In the Bible, individual truths have their context in The Truth, which is Jesus. By disconnecting individual truths and using them in the world's notion of spirituality, morality, or religion, there is always the superficial benefit of behavior modification in a certain area, but the mind is set on the flesh, what it must do to be saved, blessed, or freed from the effects of the fall

to which the carnal spiritually unregenerate man is by nature born into, and to which this world has been subjected.

With the mind set on the flesh, far more so than any other so called "law" in creation, there will not be the fruit of life and peace, only the deeds of the flesh. When we do things to get things we are working. When we are concentration on how well we are doing, we are building on the old foundation of our fallen nature, and seeking the right religious technique with which we can successfully build.

But God has shown in history and His word that there is no religious practice or technique that will make man right. This was why there were two baptisms in the New Testaments. That of Jesus, for the birth of the new life, but also of John the Baptist, who preached repentance from dead works, who called even those who by man's estimation were successfully living holy and religious lives. This was because by the works of the law, by us doing something to improve ourselves, no flesh can be justified, or indeed, made anything more than what it is, flesh based on the old foundation, the fallen nature.

The Bible teaches quite clearly that the mind set on the flesh is death, yet we keep missing the Biblical context and keep reverting to religious thinking supposing that controlling our thoughts, or not giving into to sinful desires is the same thing, and it is not. It is religion, based on the flesh, and as the flesh is the foundation and where our attention is, there will always be some area that we are not concentrating on that will manifest the deeds the Bible promises are the unavoidable consequences of misunderstanding the Gospel.

People are always therefore, without true Biblical knowledge, always trimming and cutting off what they think are the bad branches, but the Gospel lays the axe to the root of the tree. When Jesus speaks of loving your neighbor as yourself, He is not asking everyone to act loving, for obedience is from the heart, not a head full of religious rules about how to act and appear holy to get God's favor. John's preaching of repentance was for all, good and bad, not just the obvious sinners.

Jesus did not come to call those who were almost perfect, those thinking they were just in need of a little help from the Holy Spirit so they could complete the job of achieving their own right standing before God.

Until a man or women comes to the end of themselves, understand what it truly means to be crucified with Christ, that we need to surrender our old foundation, what we were born from Adam to Christ, and letting Him take our old nature with Him on the cross, they never really begin to walk and abide in Christ, never leave the filthy garments of our old nature and its works and instead, by faith in the finished work of Christ, put on the new nature of those who are no longer slaves, but born in Christ, members with Him as members and joint heirs of God's household.

What terrible darkness is being spread by those claiming that they have the light and can see. Instead of Jesus being lifted up that all men might be drawn to Him, there are many ravenous wolves who seek to draw disciples after themselves by promising them freedom while adding to their chains, leading people back to hope in themselves rather than the Gospel, actually teaching faith as a work, and never presenting the object of Biblical faith, Jesus.

Col. 1:19-23 For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.

And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight— if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister.

Greater still the darkness of those who think they have been successful at applying the latest teachings and religious techniques, who think they have made their own garments white by their works, who think they are rich and in need of nothing, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain, who give to get what they may enjoy in this life, and judge by outward appearances that worldly wealth is as heavenly treasure, like the rich man who thought the goods in his barn reflected the condition of his soul.

Matthew 6:22-23 “The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!

John 8:12 Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, “I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.”

Until our minds are on Christ, and not on ourselves and our works, we will not know the freedom and liberty, we will not manifest the fruit that comes from the true joy of the Gospel. It was not a demonstration of piety or religious work that Jesus spoke of when he told the following parables.

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.

The joy of the Lord is to be our strength. But He does not dwell in temples made with hands, He is looking for those who would worship Him in spirit and in truth. Jesus was not given by God just to present another attempt to teach spiritual principles or new religious practices in the hopes that fallen man would finally have within himself the knowledge or ability to make himself holy and righteous. He cannot be packaged up and sold in teachings about religious practices and

techniques of faith, therefore today's teachers present a Christ-less Christianity, or a Christ good for starting the race, but now who stands on the side lines waiting to see who will run the fastest.

Romans 10:4 For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

The greatest commandment is to love God. This we will not do if we see Him as a task master who will only give what has been earned by our own works. This kind of love is not possible as a work, it is only a fruit of those who have truly received a knowledge of the truth, have gladly let go of all they had in themselves for what God is offering in Christ.

1 John 4:17-19 Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love. We love Him because He first loved us.

The second commandment in the New Testament, is to love and forgive our neighbors, even as a condition of our personally being qualified to receive that same forgiveness from God. It is because we have been forgiven a debt we could not pay that we in turn forgive others. There is no avoiding that truth that true fruit of the Spirit comes when one abides in Christ, and rests in the witness that we are His children in the new birth in Christ.

Matthew 18:21-35 Then Peter came to Him and said, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?"

Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven. Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. And when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him ten

thousand talents. But as he was not able to pay, his master commanded that he be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and that payment be made. The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, 'Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all.' Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt.

"But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and he laid hands on him and took him by the throat, saying, 'Pay me what you owe!' So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you all.' And he would not, but went and threw him into prison till he should pay the debt. So when his fellow servants saw what had been done, they were very grieved, and came and told their master all that had been done. Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?' And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him.

"So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses."

Jesus is not a teacher of a new truth or way we can go to reach or attain eternal life, instead, He is the Way the Truth and the Life, and no one comes to the Father but by Him. Unless we abide in Him, we can do nothing.

And so what then, would be the teachings of the New Testament that would so differ from the self help teachings of modern day commercial religious media? To not, as the religious self promoters do, preach ourselves, but Christ, to draw attention not to ourselves and our works to earn God's favor, but the complete payment that God Himself supplied when He gave His only begotten Son, who

know no sin, to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

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.”

Eph. 1:3-23 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.

In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him. In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.

In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.

Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers: that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

Eph. 3:8-20 To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him. Therefore I ask that you do not lose heart at my tribulations for you, which is your glory.

For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in

your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height— to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever.

Amen.