

# Faith and Works XXXIII

*The Contemporary and Biblical Contexts*

Col. 2:8

# Grace

Grace is never about abandoning objective truth merely to avoid the conflict of truth and error, it is forgiving the sinner as we also would be forgiven, as those equally condemned by the law with a need not just to be pardoned, but to find deliverance from a fallen nature destined to die separated from God. Grace does not change the nature of sin; it offers a change of the nature of the sinner.

Jesus prayed for the forgiveness of those who were crucifying Him. He did not imply that God should decide it was OK, instead he asked for payment for them, a payment He was willing to give Himself.

It is interesting how seriously we take discussions of sin, and working for God, for that is where we can prove ourselves and control our destiny and do the works of God usually to better succeed at our own agendas, and how causally we take Grace, which in reality is not just a pardon for sin, but is where we must begin, being born again in the risen Christ by coming to an end of ourselves, and leaving our old self crucified with Him on His cross.

The fruit of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus is love, joy, peace patience, kindness, gentleness, but only for those who rest and abide in Christ. If we do not do that, Jesus said, we can do nothing. If we are not abiding in Christ, but instead are operating from ourselves, with our carnal natures as our foundation, then our mind is set on the flesh.

Abiding in Christ results in fruit, remaining in ourselves results in deeds. And the problem with that is that the Flesh will never do anything as an act of pure Grace, it will always operate with a calculated agenda to further its own success, even to the point of performing acts of charity.

When we do this without true love, the love that we can come to when we truly receive and rest in God's love for us, then we become actors, we perform acts of love and charity simply because we are calculating that is the best way to reward

ourselves with what will come back to us, and to that end, we are simply modifying our behavior, our nature has not changed.

All too often it seems discussions of Grace and Law focus on whether we should feel guilty, or continue to try to live a holy life. We can miss the point that we need to partake of Christ, it is He Himself of which we are to partake as the way, truth and life.

Grace is a free gift, the door is open, but to remain in ourselves content to know that the sins of the world have been condemned with Christ on the cross and never passing through that door personally leaves us still married to the first husband who still will succumb to all the effects of the fall.

Law brings knowledge of our sinful condition, but we are not sinners because we sin, we sin because we are by nature children of wrath. Unless one is born again, and rests in that birth, leaving the old behind and not looking back, one will not see the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus said, pick up your cross and follow me. It was not a reference to a life of torture of one's flesh, but of letting it go as worthless and finished, of having Christ as the foundation for who and what we are. Our way is not in ourselves, Christ is the way, truth and the life, and no one comes to the father but by Him.

Christian virtue and behavior must be firmly grounded on the foundation of the complete rest of the individual in the finished work of Christ or the individual will simply focus on their own measurement according to a set of rules rather than faith in Christ for their standing before God and man.

And the end result, underneath the religious white washed tomb, will be dead man's bones. Love will be conditional, for that is what they are experiencing in their relationship with God. They will secretly delight in the failure of others, for that validates their own lack of success at perfecting themselves. Acts of charity

will always be done with a calculation on the merits and rewards that will accrue to the account of the individual performing them.

And when winning the approval of man no longer satisfies the need for self esteem, when it no longer can fill that place that only God Himself can fill, people will move on to the next big thing that looks like it's going somewhere, following the latest secular or religious trend, identifying with the leaders or truths that are in vogue, always learning but never coming to a knowledge of the truth, which is in Jesus.

John the Baptist, in preparing people, both religious and not to be ready to receive the Messiah, to recognize that all had sinned and were equally in need of a savior, said the axe had to be laid at the root of the tree. As long as we approach religion as external conformity to behavior, as long as we are in the business of trimming the fig leaves and branches of the tree whose roots are still in who we are apart from God always seeking the way to earn His favor, or to become like Him through spiritual knowledge, we are going to miss completely what Jesus said when he taught that out of the heart comes that which defiles a man.

External religious conformity to a prescribed set of rules can produce a more stable social unit, but it will not result in a life changed from the inside. If what is inside is still the darkness of a life not centered in the new life that Christ offers, then what is within will always have the potential of rising to the surface untamed by the proscribed standards of external performance, once the benefits of maintaining the external veneer of religion or behavior are no longer expedient.

We are told in the Bible that in the last days we will see a great falling away, even of those who were considered the elect. The reason will undoubtedly be that their motivation for conformity will no earn them the results they are seeking. Doing things for the sake of the approval of man, at least in a religious context, will no longer be a compelling reason for continuing to seek success in meeting the proscribed standards, probably because those who set the standards will themselves

be found to offer a false hope for those they convinced to follow them. They too will be in need of a solution to the shaking that will test every foundation for everything will be shaken in the last days. Only those rooted and grounded in the foundation of faith in Christ will be able to stand.

If the following scriptures describe one's current orientation to God through His grace of new life in Christ Jesus, the previous observations can be ignored.

**Matthew 10:39** He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it.

**Matthew 16:25** For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.

**Matthew 16:26** 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?

**Mark 8:35** For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it.

**Matthew 10:38** And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me.

**Matthew 16:24** 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."

**Mark 8:34** When He had called the people to Himself, with His disciples also, He said to them, "Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me."

**Mark 10:21** Then Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, "One thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me."

**Luke 9:23** Then He said to them all, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me."

**Luke 14:28-30** For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it — lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish'?

**Galatians 2:17-21** But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is Christ therefore a minister of sin? Certainly not! For if I build again those things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor. For I through the law died to the law that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain.

**1 Corinthians 3:10-15** According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

**Romans 6:1-14** What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.

**1 Peter 1:13** Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

**Romans 8:24** For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees?

**Hebrews 11:1** Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

**1 Peter 3:15** But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear;

**1 John 3:3** And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

**Colossians 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.

**John 15:5** 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.