

# Faith and Works XXXVII

*The Contemporary and Biblical Contexts*

Col. 2:8

# The Word

We are as a culture no longer speaking of the same things when we use the terms Spirit, God, Salvation and Revelation as they all become in our post modern culture subjective to the users experience to define what they mean rather than the specific context and definition described in scripture.

And the scripture is not so much itself defining these terms, but rather showing the work of the Holy Spirit inspiring the authors of the many books in the Bible to proclaim a consistent witness of God's revelation and work in the lives of real men and women in history. In a way, the experience of the participants took place in the context of God's truth.

Too often when we are reading the bible we hear it speak in our voice, rather than its own. One would assume if the Holy Spirit has truly inspired the writings, particularly in the New Testament written by the disciples of Jesus, Peter, Paul, Luke, John, Matthew, Jude, that we would find consistency in what they are saying, that they would all be on the same page, not different. They may each speak in their own unique voice and idiom, and they may be addressing and emphasizing particular issues, but the foundation of the message will be clear and consistent throughout all their writings.

This is a very different notion from what people do in the modern concept of spiritual revelation, where they treat the Bible as an Ouija board or fortune cookie, "Who knows what you will find today?" It now all depends on the subjective experience of whoever is looking at it at the time.

Unlike the philosophies and ideologies of past generations which rested on world views that could be examined and debated against objective criteria such as economics, science or history, and in which Christians sought to meet in the marketplace of ideas with those truly seeking relevant answers, today's post modern culture has plenty of dialog, but has conversation only under the conditions

that conclusions based on objective definitions are invalid and only relevant to ones subjective interpretation and experience. One must agree that the conversation may be started, but that once started, it can never be finished.

That is one reason the "new" spirituality based on the blend of western occultism and eastern mysticism provides a coherent structure that actually provides legitimacy to the post modern viewpoint. Both deny the validity of objective truth that defines experience, and say that experience in itself, whether religious or psychological experience, is the bases of truth, but only for the one having the experience.

Contrast that modern mindset with the revelation of Christ as the fulfillment of God's work in history as witnessed to by the Law, the Prophets and the Apostles. The words He spoke were spirit and life, yes, but they were completely in accord with the Law and the Prophets written testimony of God's interaction and inspiration of mankind in history.

While we may agree that it sounds quite reasonable and humble in the contemporary discourse on matters of religious faith to say that one can never know all there is to know about God, and that therefore we need to caution against being too dogmatic or rigid in our current understanding, yet where Christianity is concerned, our knowledge is progressive not in a dialectic sense of thesis and antithesis, but rather that as our understanding of Christ continues to grow, yet He remains our focus, the author, prefector and finisher of our faith.

One should also keep in mind that an assertion that we cannot know God is argued on the bases of facts, and so for reason to reliably operate, even when asserting non reason, we inadvertently demonstrate that truth and non truth are not as insubstantial as our post modern culture would like to believe. A remains not non A, and there is only a disagreement as to when we know we know what A is.

Many times in an unguarded moment, the candid admission is made by the fiercest intellectual opponents of God, that their arguments against knowing objective truth about God has as its base motive the unwillingness of men to consider submission to a higher power before whom they would one day be required to give an account.

In that sense therefore, there have always been arguments, not on behalf of truth, but on behalf of those who are arguing. Our natural tendency is to base our self esteem on what people are saying about us because of what we are saying and doing, instead of our self esteem being based on what God has said and done on our behalf by uniting us with Him in and through Christ.

One needs to distinguish between sufficient knowledge, and complete knowledge. When we go too far in our concepts about God, beyond what He has chosen to reveal of Himself, our words become disconnected from objective truth, and become mere formulas of logical propositions, compellingly complete within their own system of definition, but not necessarily founded on objective truth.

What usually will attract our natural minds to a given idea, philosophy or doctrine will be how successful it is at naming everything we have to name, how well it identifies and gives structure to everything around us. Unfortunately, just because we are able to answer all our questions with a given structure of philosophy, idealism or doctrine, does not necessarily mean that the answers our system of thought is providing are true, it only demonstrates that they are just logical and consistent within the confines of that system and structure of thought.

Usually we think if there are unanswered questions, then there is something wrong with the doctrine, but if we have got one that is able to answer everything and meet all our needs for answering our questions, then we think it is true simply because of its success in answering all our questions, rather than whether or not the answers are true. In the area of truth about God, our own ability to reveal our inner truth before Him often inhibits our ability to concede that we ultimately will answer to Him for our actions here in this momentary temporal existence.

Theology has often progressed to the point where it is building on itself and not the revealed truth in the scriptures. It becomes a matter of simply stringing together mental concepts, defined units of thought, into a coherent whole that agrees with the constituent definitions that have been agreed upon. It works consistently within the environment defined by itself.

This is why the Word, Jesus Christ, became flesh, for the truth we need is the true life that is in the person of Christ Himself, not in a proposition. It is a person in whom God has asked us to put our faith.

**John 1:1-14** In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world.

He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

When the Bible says "the Word became flesh", and that Jesus is the Word", it is who Jesus is who redefines the usage and meaning of the word "Word". We should not redefine Jesus by our own concept of the word "Word" as it is used in various non Christian philosophies or proposed metaphysical systems.

There is a difference between someone who loves to be seen in the position of a teacher of truth, and someone who loves the truth they teach.

When the early Corinthian church was beginning to show signs of division due to disputes over which teachings and teachers to follow, Paul brought the issue back to a very simple foundation, that of Christ Himself.

**1 Corinthians 1:10-31** Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's household, that there are contentions among you. Now I say this, that each of you says, "I am of Paul," or "I am of Apollos," or "I am of Cephas," or "I am of Christ." Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?

I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, lest anyone should say that I had baptized in my own name. Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas. Besides, I do not know whether I baptized any other. For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect.

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written:

" I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,  
And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent."

Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence. But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption—that, as it is written, "He who glories, let him glory in the LORD."

The way to hear the Word of God is not to try to receive it as something that complements and completes something that we know, rather it is complete in itself, in its entirety the Gospel fully encompasses all that God wishes us to know, and it is the power of God, for the redeeming of mankind, and those that rest totally in it by faith, to produce the fruits, of righteousness of God for those abiding in Christ Jesus.

Ultimately it is God's word that must define itself, and it does so through 66 books written by 40 authors through a period of 2500 years or more, through the failures and successes of prophets, Kings, and even simple shepherds.

The Bible is not pointing to itself as a destination, the Bible is pointing to Jesus, or when we get a revelation through the word and the witness of the Holy Spirit of the Glory of God in the face of Christ, and when our faith is transferred from our own abilities and works and from basing all that we are and do on the old foundation of ourselves, and it is instead placed on Christ, when by faith all that He has done and all that He is becomes the foundation for ourselves, that is salvation. It is not faith in a doctrine about Christ, it is faith in Christ Himself, and our life is to be understood to be hide in Christ in God, and He Himself is the foundation on which we are to remain steadfast. He is the way, the truth and the life. It is only through Him we are in union with the Father, in whom we live and move and have our being.

If someone has been in a ministry or religious organization for a number of years, and has completed all the Bible courses, served in the religious organization faithfully, yet after a number of years their self esteem is still hanging by a thread, based upon whether or not they think that day they are going to receive approval and acceptance for what they have done, that person is receiving an incomplete Gospel, and in incomplete Gospel is really no Gospel at all, for the Gospel is complete in itself, it's not augmented by other truths, it is the truth about the Truth, Jesus Christ.

Often there arises a question of what role of the Holy Spirit and personal revelation play in our understanding of the Bible. Some assert that we need the Holy Spirit to reveal all kinds of layers of esoteric truth and hidden meanings and allegories in the Bible. The conceit here is that merely reading the text and comprehending its meaning based upon the meaning of the words written on the page is not spiritual. But to take a truly Biblical perspective of this question is to ask if we are receiving the witness of the Holy Spirit of the simple and pure truth of the Gospel, the

testimony of Jesus, and that it is being accepted to the point where it's a reality to the point where we will place everything we are on the foundation of faith in Christ, and abide in Him as our rock and foundation.

**John 5:39** You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me.

The Holy Spirit is there to confirm that God's word is true, not give us a unique interpretation that no one else can see of what is written there.

When somebody writes a letter, we usually do not read just a sentence or a few words out of it and think we have understood the message. were inspired to write messages to the church to convey the truth of the gospel. If we do not read them through in context and get the overall message and instead split them up into little tiny messages, all unique and standing alone according to our own interpretation, we are going to miss God's revelation to us. And those who do that, those who base their doctrine on a few choice interpretations of a couple of words or scriptures, are actually denying the miracle that is the 66 books that make up the canon of the Bible.

For in that we see the Spirit of God consistently at work, so that people from all places and walks of life over a period of over 2500 years, yet are able to have their writings combined and we find that there is a consistent inspiration and revelation of God and His purpose revealed all through the writings. That cannot be done with any other book and if we treat the Bible as if it was just a random puzzle or a bunch of individual fortune cookies or formulas is to truly deny the uniqueness that is the Bible.

The popular religious culture has settled into complacency concerning the true message of the Gospel and the Bible, of the law and the prophets, to the point where most people articulate their faith with a few religious clichés, bits and pieces of scripture grasped while flipping and flopping through the Bible following the

opinions and ideas of men. They never come to an understanding of the complete message the scriptures have to tell, but instead keep looking for verses which are chosen to reinforce the messages generated from within the current culture of popular religion.

We are told in the Bible of the false prophets, the heretics, the false shepherds that come to steal, kill and destroy, who will seek to draw disciples after themselves, and so the greatest heresy might not always be errant doctrine, but simply putting too much of ourselves in the way so that the Gospel is hindered and incomplete.

**Acts 20:29-32** 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.

“So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

The great deception in the church today may be that the Gospel, or a mix or subset of the Gospel and other teachings, is being offered as an answer to the wrong questions, the questions that we are born asking until we come to the end of ourselves and realize we are the problem, not what we do.

Many people, however, view the Christian faith as merely a matter of exchanging life styles, a secular life style for a religious or spiritual life style, whatever the current Christian or religious culture popularly defines.

But when we read in the Bible that we are to renew our mind it is not simply telling us to learn new things to do, it is telling us to learn who we are in Christ by learning who He is, satisfying ourselves and being content in what we have in Him. Until Jesus is the foundation of all that we are and all that we do, or works

and efforts are still going to be, whether they are religious or secular, still focuses on building on the old foundation.

The fruit is not the root. A lot of people religiously think that the Gospel is a methodology for improving our temporal lives. But instead, the Biblical Gospel is the door we go through, the way we take when we come to the end ourselves.

The true Gospel is not telling us to merely change our behavior and earn our right to stand before God, the new behavior is supposed to be a result of putting on a new life, Christ Himself, and no longer identifying ourselves by ourselves.

The Gospel is not about us, it is about us in Christ, and through Him being our reunited and in fellowship with God as His children, and so Jesus is to be where our focus is directed, not ourselves.

Christ is the wisdom of God. We do not need to figure out God and how He operates, we need to listen to Him when He presents to us Jesus in history through the law and the prophets, and when He confirms in our hearts the message of the Gospel by the conviction and inner witness of the Holy Spirit, so that we acknowledge that our righteousness is as filthy rags, and we need to be delivered from the bondage of this death, and not just given a new set of instructions on how to improve it.

Carnality is simply anything that focuses on or continues to build on, or produces results from that foundation that we originally inherited from Adam. It will always leave us in debt to the flesh, and at enmity with God, and in competition with those around us as we compare ourselves by ourselves to see who is approved in their works. Cain murdered his brother because Cain's works were evil and his brother's righteous. (1 John 3:12)

**Romans 8:5** 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.

Granted our behavior should change, but it is our faith that will result in changed behavior, not faith defined on behavior. Fruit is actions motivated as a response to God's love for us in Christ, it comes from the heart, not as a way of outward appearance, but as something genuinely coming forth from our inner being as fruit, having supplied good ground for the seed of the Gospel.

**2 Corinthians 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.

**1 Peter 3:3-4** Do not let your adornment be merely outward—arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel — rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God.

One may not ever come to know God as He knows Himself, but we can, as His members of and within His creation know what He chooses to communicate through revelation and history.

Until we get the entire and complete message of God's revelation in the Bible are not going to know what His agenda is. And those who are only interested in finding the answers to their own agenda are just going to be sifting through the book as if it was a bunch of recipes looking for whatever they can find to fit their own needs.

Is the Gospel really that simple? Just believe on Him whom He has sent. Just because something can be easily expressed in a few phrases does not necessarily mean that what is being expressed is any less profound.

**1 Corinthians 2:1-5** And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

The Apostles were not on a mission to make a name for themselves in history. They did not lose their lives in an effort to earn their way into paradise, rather, their faith in Christ assured them that they were His, and complete in Him, they could withstand all opposition directed at them on behalf of their stand for the Gospel by the word of their testimony, and that they did not love their mortal lives, even unto death.

They were not people who had put themselves in motion. They encountered something real, tangible, that caused a reaction, even changing the very course of their lives.

**2 Peter 1:16** For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty.

**1 John 1:1-4** That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life— the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us— that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. And these things we write to you that your joy may be full.

**Acts 26:4-23** “My manner of life from my youth, which was spent from the beginning among my own nation at Jerusalem, all the Jews know. They knew me from the first, if they were willing to testify, that according to the strictest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee. And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers. To this promise our twelve tribes, earnestly serving God night and day, hope to attain. For this hope’s sake, King Agrippa, I am accused by the Jews. Why should it be thought incredible by you that God raises the dead?

“Indeed, I myself thought I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. This I also did in Jerusalem, and many of the saints I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them . And I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted them even to foreign cities.

“While thus occupied, as I journeyed to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, at midday, O king, along the road I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and those who journeyed with me. And when we all had fallen to the ground, I heard a voice speaking to me and saying in the Hebrew language, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’ So I said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ And He said, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you. I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.’

“Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but declared first to those in Damascus and in Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance. For these reasons the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me . Therefore, having obtained help from God, to this day I stand, witnessing both to small and great, saying no other things than those which the prophets and Moses said would come— that the Christ would suffer, that He would be the first to rise from the dead, and would proclaim light to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles.”

Jesus spoke of a key, Himself, that if scribes had it, they would be able to unlock treasures, both old and new, from the scriptures. Paul spoke of a veil that remains over our hearts, and is only taken away, in Christ.

Before we can come to a knowledge of Christ, we need to come to self knowledge, there is a path we need to take. While the promises were given to Abraham, the message of grace is so severe and has such significance, and is such a terminal point, from where we start at birth by nature, and where God would have us end in His Son.

Until we allow that progression to self knowledge to come about, the knowledge of who we are standing before god, in that place where we can finally see what He is offering us in Christ, we will not understand that He is the way, the truth , and the life. He will become only a truth when we again believe that we do not have a need to be found in Him, but only to improve ourselves by seeking spiritual power and the merits earned by our works.

**2 Cor. 4:3-6** But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them. For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bond servants for Jesus' sake. For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

God's agenda needs to be our agenda. What are the issues He is addressing? If Jesus is the answer, what is the question that is being answered? What does God think it is important for us to know? What is He communicating in His word as He inspires the writers by His spirit and even moves through man's history shaping and forming events to reveal His purpose?

The point where we come to the end of ourselves, and our own understandings, is the point where we meet God. Where we are ready to hear His answer rather than seeking our own.

**Galatians 2:20-21** 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. do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain.”

**Colossians 3: 1-4** 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.