

# Faith and Works XXXVIII

The Contemporary and Biblical Contexts

Col. 2:8

# Externals

Apart from Christ the only God that we will know will be made in our own image, a projection of our internalized impression of authority distilled from what we have experienced from our social environment. We are born and are by nature, the Bible says, children of wrath, at enmity with God (Eph. 2:1-3), for in our now fallen condition we instinctively seek to compete with God or control our relationship with Him by our works. It is only when we come to the point where we trust the love of God and allow Him to accept us as new creations in Christ that we have a bases for true relationship with Him.

**1 john 1:23** Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either; he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also.

**John 14:6** Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.

But the closer we come to Him, the more His holiness contrasts with the filthy rags we wear in our attempts to cover our nakedness. Only those on the foundation of Christ, having had all the wood, hay and stubble burnt away leaving only the Gold, that which we have become as we abide in and partake of His nature in Christ, can stand before Him.

We began to despise ourselves shortly after we took on the role of knowing as God and judging right and wrong as a criteria for attaining eternity based on performance. We are our own task masters, not a judgmental God. He put Abraham to sleep when it came to the details of how He would provide the blessing of all mankind from the seed based on the promise. Only God Himself passed between the torn animals as Abraham slept. He would take the responsibility for both His word, and mans failure before His holiness.

And indeed, God's law, while providing a standard of His righteousness, was also to be the means were man came to realize the need for atonement, that without the shedding of blood there would be no remission of sin.

He became the way, truth and the life when He become one of us, the son of God who surrendered His position as God to take with us in our mortality our position separated from the life of God and destined as descendants of Adam's fall to death. He Himself passed into our death and through it creating a new unity of man and God in Himself, a new creation for those who have come to know their need of a physician.

After the fall, creation was changed to continue with only the energy that existed at the moment of the fall, as God was rejected by Adam, so all that was under him was subjected with him to continue on sustained by itself as it was now out of fellowship and dependence on God who as the creator is the source of non ending life. Creation was thus changed to its current fallen state so that it could now continue existing by re-organizing itself utilizing the available remaining energy in an entropic system.

This temporal temporary existence was established to sustain mankind so that those who hungered and thirsted after God and His righteousness would have the chance to receive the knowledge of His salvation as He became one with man and passing through man's death into a new unity of life in Christ. Through faith in Gods provision of salvation in Christ, and by choosing to release their hold and dependence on the fallen state, mankind would be able to continue on into the new creation that God has made in Christ that He might once again be all and through all.

The natural self hatred man experiences toward himself, and projects to his or her fellow man, is not ultimately rooted in our parents rejection, nor in our social rejection due to our failure to meet the temporal externally based superficial and transitory standards of the current fads of this culture, no, it is from our deep inner

knowledge that we have from birth that we are separated from the life of God and eternity.

This knowledge we seek to suppress by filling our lives with the concerns of this temporal and fleeting world, as if meeting its demands are all that matters. That knowledge we unconsciously have that by ourselves based on ourselves, we fail to become as God by seeking to know as God knows concerning what is good and evil, for apart from His life, that in which all creation is to live and move and have their being, there is no life, no access to eternity, only a momentary existence while we wait for this fallen creation to run its course consuming itself in its last efforts to perpetuate itself based on itself apart from Him who intended His creation to be sustained by His life for eternity.

This is experienced in our daily lives by the dependency we have of each other when we lack the bases for who we are rooted in the foundation that only God can supply as the sustainer of his creation. Apart from the life of God we are seeking to sustain ourselves by ourselves within the diminishing entropic environment that is the fallen world in which we continue to exist pending the final dissolution when all shall be shaken that is not on the foundation of the rock, Christ, and a new heaven and new earth is created for those who would reign as joint heirs and members of God's family in Christ.

Fashion and the current standards of beauty have an aspect of imposed subjectivity in that the eye of the beholder is conditioned to see through the lens of the current cultural expectations and stereo types. Therefore all the makeup and clothes and hair styles do not necessarily make one more beautiful as much as in themselves they are signs and symbols that one is seeking to present themselves and qualify to be included within a recognizable and pre-defined category of fashion that already has agreed upon roles, responsibilities and rewards granted by consensus of the community conditioned to accept and grant the currently defined rewards from such roles.

And it is the idol of fashion itself that men are seeking, which is why there is the result of depersonalization and abstraction of the human aspect of our relationships when they are based on the external qualifications that we strive to meet in fulfilling each other's expectations in fulfilling that ideal. That often becomes the primary goal of our exchange of social transactions with each other. We only merit the benefits granted by society for such roles if we successfully meet each other's expectations of what we must do to fully satisfy all the criteria that are required in actions and appearance to be accepted and included in that role.

What does a man love, the idol that a woman reminds him of, the symbol that society collectively currently holds up as the fulfillment of the emptiness fallen man is born with? Or does he love the person God has made to be flesh of his flesh, bone of his bone, does he love his wife as himself?

All of the current emphasis by those presenting themselves as leaders in spiritual development on our needing to find our purpose, destiny and our true satisfaction and sense of fulfillment and well being based on roles that we play and deeds that we do, particularly within the pre-defined roles of the contemporary organizations of culture and religion, testify to the fact that the original Gospel, that which was really supposed to be the foundation for who we are, and why we do what we do, has been lost.

The people who are truly satisfied don't do things to find their own fulfillment. They do them because they are fulfilled. They do them because they have learned the secret of being content in all circumstances, because they have their heart set on a treasure where moth, rust and thief cannot destroy, reserved in Heaven for them. They do not love to earn love, they love because they have received the love of God in Christ.

**2 Cor. 5:14-15** For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.

They truly have purpose and their self esteem is based upon the foundation of who they are centered in Christ, a joint heir with Him. Those, whose treasures are in heaven, will have their hearts there. They will be the ones who do what they do out of love. If we do all things, but do not have love, we are nothing. Many people are therefore being compelled to do acts of love, but they are not doing what they do out of love, but as a work to earn love.

Many today are doing what they do because they have been taught and oriented to think that the acts themselves are the things that provide them their purpose. They are looking at their deeds, looking at what they have done, and they are evaluating their works, measuring themselves by themselves by whatever external standards are currently in vogue, and taking temporary conditional satisfaction in ascertaining where they are on this imaginary ladder that all of us are by nature born attempting to climb by our own efforts.

When we look in the mirror we are often superimposing that image we think we have earned from our peers, or God himself. There are never enough cosmetics, hair treatments, or physical disciplines that will ever transfer us from the realm of mortal to immortality. As long as our foundation is ourselves, we will only be building with wood hay and stubble on the old foundation that we inherited from Adam.

Eating disorders that progress to the point where ones knees are bigger than ones thighs, might bring one to stop and ask if they are a stick figure, or a person of flesh and blood. But we look at ourselves all too often through the eyes of our culture, or the condemning spirit of the principalities of this world who are ultimately intent on our self destruction. So we often do not see what is really

before us in the mirror. We do not evaluate ourselves by pragmatic eternal criteria; instead we are measuring ourselves by a standard that ultimately cannot be achieved using the foundation and materials we have to build with.

We become a slave to anything out of fear, and all fears, big and small are rooted in the ultimate fear of death, being separated from our environment. We can become, for instance, a slave to fashion out of fear of not being accepted by meeting the standards of fashion. We are all born needing something besides ourselves to complete ourselves, and the approval of those around us.

Once we have accepted the ground rules of what defines us, and the standards required to achieve success within that defined system, we have already placed ourselves within the confines of a system that will always leave us a debtor to the systems requirements.

The church was always intended to function by a different dynamic than that around which the world usually resolves. It was a dynamic that authenticated the uniqueness of mans individuality as created in the image of God, that upheld man's worth by God's love and work in Christ, of being established by Him in eternity, and becoming once again members of His family in Christ. It was not based upon man trying to be as God or attempting to please or put God Himself in our debt, but rather by our choosing to rest and accept who He says we are in Christ, and by faith in the Gospel, and our choosing to leave behind all that we might have achieved had we continued to rely on our own works and our own resources that we inherited from the fall.

It is hard to know if one is on the path that leads to life or not, if one does not know where one is going. Our goal as Christians is Jesus Himself; we are to fix our eyes on Him, the author, perfecter and finisher of our faith. With our eyes fixed on Him we will plow a straight line, and not go off course as did Lots wife by looking back.

Modern therapy and Christian counseling often deal with self esteem issues by attempting to help people develop positive mental attitudes, and a new image of themselves, to try to get them to see themselves differently. The problem with all of this is that it still in the end leaves our attention on ourselves. It is when we come to the end of ourselves, and we are looking at Christ that we truly step into the life that the New Testament Gospel is offering. For true life is in Christ, and our life is to be found and based on Christ.

**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.

The Bible tells us that when Christ appears, we shall be like Him, that this tent that we now inhabit will be set aside, and we will be finally clothed in the likeness of Christ. For now, however, while we still abide in our earthly tents, we are looking not at the external things which are perishing, but at the internal eternal things. We currently have this treasure in a clay vessel. It is the emphasis on the clay vessel, the popular notion that Christianity is just a better way to achieve a positive self mental attitude and image of ourselves, that will keep us in the endless cycle of trying to build on the old foundation, of trying to put new wine into old wineskin's.

The Gospel is not trying to redefine ourselves; it is trying get us to define ourselves by who Christ is, to no longer use ourselves as our foundation.

**Galatians 2:20** 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.

And at a certain point it does not matter where our self image is coming from. If it is still all about the image we have of ourselves, whether it is coming from the secular culture or popular religion, as long as we are dependent on who we are, and

not who Christ is, and our focus and evaluation is in attempting to re-categorize and re evaluate our own potential, to become more hopeful and positive simply because these are attitudes that lead to success, if we are caught up in this process, then we are not partaking of Christ, we are not following the Gospel. We still are relying on the old foundation, and we will continue to focus on ourselves, trying to compensate and overcome the inherent weakness that we all have as child of Adam.

Telling a sinner that they should have a more positive attitude, because after all God loves them, and created them, telling them that they are special, is not doing anybody a service from the standpoint of successfully administering the Gospel in spirit and in truth. We are to pick up our cross and follow Christ, and unless we eat of His flesh and drink His blood, unless we abide in Him, we can do nothing, for we are not completed by Him, we are complete in Him.

As long as the emphasis is to make us comfortable and established in our old nature with merely a few modifications in behavior, diet or thoughts concerning ourselves, rather than turning our attention to Christ and building on Him and who He is, all our efforts, as well meaning as they seem, are in the end only going to be as successful as are any of the secular counter parts in simply changing and reforming behavior.

We may be able to think differently about ourselves, but as long as we are still based on ourselves, the inherent weakness of that foundation and the building we are attempting to construct on that sand, will never come to the equivalent promised by the Gospel for those who would build their house on the rock, which is Christ Himself.

Often our relationships suffer because they are being used for their potential to contribute to the success and acceptance we are attempting to achieve in a given social circle and within which we seek to find our support and self affirmation. We

often do not care what the particular rules or standards of the group are, only that we can be successful in following them.

We often seek associations based on where we feel comfortable in meeting the perceived expectations, rather than whether or not the groups coherency is based on ideals that we aspire to. While a certain group may center on very strict rules concerning behavior or conduct, yet if those are things that are achievable they are preferred over the uncertainty of relationships that are not guaranteed and under our control.

Until our personal orientation of faith is firmly on Christ, and the Gospel is being applied to our lives in its entirety, the unity of the body of Christ can never reach that demonstration of the Christian church that we see in the New Testament.

**Galatians 3:26-28** 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.

It is here that the gifts of the Holy Spirit are operating in such a gathering of individuals to the end that all would mature to the full stature of what it means to be in and do all things through Christ. They do not redefine themselves simply because God loves them, for His love is shown in the offering of His Son. We need to receive by faith the gift given by God of Christ because of His love for us, to redefine ourselves because as Christ is, so are we in this world.

**Ephesians 4;11-16** 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 treasure in the earthen vessel is the Glory of God in the face of Christ, and the inner witness of the Holy Spirit with ours that God is now our Father, that we are not slaves, and that we are now through faith in Christ members of His household, joint heirs in Christ. When this mortal is put away we shall all be clothed in His likeness. And that is the Christian hope, the bases and foundation of our identity, how we are to see ourselves, as His workmanship, as something He has made new in His Son, not something we have done ourselves. It is how we are to measure ourselves, for we are only complete in Him.

We are not redefining the old nature; we are leaving the old nature behind. Our focus and our attention is now on whom Jesus is, not on who we can convince ourselves we are based upon some new potential we might come by with God in our corner helping us perfect ourselves. To the extent that we leave behind all the things we used to trust in, or sought as a support, even those things that by the world's standards were considered assets, and instead place all that we are and all that we do on the bases of Christ Himself who is our life, that is when the power of God and the Holy Spirit will be able to work in our lives, for we will not be serving

Him to become great, we will be giving glory to Him, not trying to build ourselves up based on what we do for Him.