

Chapter IX

FAITH WITHOUT WORKS

There are many different religious systems in the world, both in and outside of the canopy of Christianity. Ultimately the question must arise, which system is the correct system, or is there more than one correct system? If you were to question individuals from each of the religious systems of this world, they would assure you that their system is the correct system. Nevertheless if there is but One God as the Bible states, then the way to God must be God's way. The world does not think this way. It reasons according to what seems right to it (Proverbs 14:12); but the Scriptures are very clear, Jesus Christ is the only way into the presence of God (John 14:6).

We believe the Bible to be the Word of God. We believe the Bible supplies sufficient evidence to support this claim. The Bible discloses God's plan of salvation. It also discloses that God is Eternal and He is Omniscient. Therefore God's plan of salvation has been known to God for all eternity; and, of necessity, God's plan of salvation satisfies all of His attributes. Thus it satisfies His Love, Mercy and Grace without impugning His Holiness, Righteousness and Justice.

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It is a perfect plan that could only be accomplished through our Lord Jesus Christ. The fact that Jesus is the way, the truth and the life, and that no man cometh unto the Father but by Him, was revealed in a conversation between our Lord and Thomas the night before Jesus was crucified (John 14:1-6); and it was proven to be true by His resurrection from the dead (Romans 1:1-4).

In the Bible we learn that all of the writers of Scripture, both Old and New Testaments, were Jews. Despite this, the Scriptures do not present the Jews in a very good light. Their history is fraught with disobedience to God, rebellion and unrestrained idolatry. In fact, Israel's apostasy was so severe, she rejected and crucified her own God. Afterwards she was cut off as the custodian of the truth, and the wild olive branch has been grafted into her place for the period of the church age (Romans 11:13-25).

Thus at the present time the church, composed of Jews and Gentiles, has been made the custodian of the truth. The church will continue in this position until she also apostatizes. At the height of this apostasy, the true church (all of the redeemed of all ages) will be resurrected to heaven. Then the antichrist will counterfeit the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. He, with the apostate churches of this world, will set up a counterfeit kingdom of God upon this earth. This will bring the great tribulation period upon the earth, and during this period of time God will send one hundred and forty-four thousand witnesses (twelve thousand of each of the twelve tribes of Israel) to testify to the truth of the Scriptures upon the earth. Their ministry will replace the ministry of the resurrected church, and their ministry will continue until Jesus Christ comes to judge the antichrist and to establish His kingdom upon this earth.

Thus Israel and the church have been (and will yet be) used of God to testify to the truth

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of the Word of God. All other religious systems, as well as many in Jewry and Christianity, have fallen prey to the lie of the Devil. This lie had its beginning in the human family in the garden of Eden when Eve was deceived by it (spoken by the serpent), and when Adam willfully sinned. Thus it was in the garden of Eden that the necessity for redemption was born, and it was there that the truth of the gospel began to be revealed.

The Bible declares Adam was created in the image of God. Thus before the fall, Adam was perfect and without sin. The Bible declares that Eve was formed from a rib taken from Adam's side, so she too was perfect and without sin. Thus, having been created in the image of God, they were placed in the garden of Eden with only one commandment:

... Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof [dying, thou shalt die]. (Genesis 2:16-17)

There were many trees in the garden of Eden. All of them were good for food, but only two are named in the Scriptural account. They are the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The tree of life was there because of God. It had one role before the fall and another after. It bore God's promise of life to the one who would partake of its fruit. Thus it was the tree of life; but after the fall it came to represent the truth of the gospel, because the Lord bore our judgment on the cross of Calvary (John 3:14-15). In stark contrast to the tree of life, it appears that the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (though not directly stated in Scripture) came to be in the garden of Eden because of the Devil. Thus it was used of the serpent to deceive Eve. It promised life, but it produced death. Thus it too has a double role. It was used of the serpent to present the Devil's lie to Eve; but afterwards it represents the concept it produced, a

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way which seemeth right unto a man (i.e., another gospel), but the end thereof are the ways of death (Proverbs 14:12).

This is not apparent in the account in Genesis but is known by the progressive revelation of God. We learn many things by progressive revelation as we go through the Bible. Everything we need to know about a subject is not found in one place. For example, in Genesis it is evident the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was a temptation to Eve. Later, in the book of James, James reveals that God cannot be tempted with evil, neither does He tempt man with evil. Finally, in the parable of the tares and the wheat found in Matthew, Mark and Luke, we learn that the Lord planted the wheat (the good seed), while the Devil planted the tares. By analogy, the wheat represents the truth of the gospel, and the tares represent the counterfeit gospel of the Devil. Thus, by progressive revelation, we know the Devil was responsible for the presence of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in Eden, just as he is responsible (in this age) for the tares sown among the wheat.

The Devil used the tree of the knowledge of good and evil to promote his counterfeit gospel (his lie), which in this age corresponds with the tares. He seduced Eve with his lie by promising her life (and not death) if she would eat of the fruit of that tree:

Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: for [Elohim] doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as [Elohim], knowing good and evil.

And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat. And the eyes of them

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both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons. (Genesis 3:1-7. emphasis mine)

An analysis of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil gives us an insight into the religions of the world. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil supplied Adam and Eve with a knowledge of good and evil independent of God and in rebellion against God. This is now the source of man's morality, which is directly related to his religious ideas.

Therefore man is not a moral being because he was created in the image of God. He lost that image when he sinned against God. Man's sin gave him a new image, and this image is more like the one who caused his fall than like God. Man is egotistical and full of pride. He has a sin nature and is in rebellion against God. His heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked (Jeremiah 17:9). Thus man's ill-gained morality has produced a way which seems right to a man, but the results of this way of thinking always produces death (Proverbs 14:12). Consequently the many religions and moral systems of man promise life, but they always produce death, because their roots are in the lie and not in the truth. This is the reason our Lord said:

Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruit. O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. (Matthew 12:33-34)

Our Lord also said:

Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them. (Matthew 7:15-20, emphasis mine)

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These statements by our Lord should have directed us to the two trees named in the account of the garden of Eden (the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and the tree of life); but they have not done this because preachers and religious teachers have pointed at various kinds of base behavior (in both men and women), and they have misapplied these statements of our Lord to them. This does not make sense. Do not most religious systems espouse good moral behavior? How then can moral behavior differentiate between the true prophet and the false prophet?

The tree of the knowledge of good and evil manifested three things: it was good for food, it was pleasant to the eyes, and it was a tree to be desired to make one wise. The first two aspects of this tree produced the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes. It is from these aspects that man has his knowledge of what he terms evil. The third aspect of the tree produced the pride of life. It is from this aspect of the tree that man has what he calls good. Therefore it is this third aspect of the tree that produced the religions of the world. Thus it produced a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.

Immediately after their sin and as a consequence of their sin, Adam and Eve felt guilt because of their nakedness and sewed fig leaves together in an attempt to cover their nakedness. Even so, their self-efforts at covering themselves did not cover their nakedness before God. Consequently they hid themselves from His presence rather than rejoicing in His presence as they had formerly done. Then, during the judgment of the serpent, God promised:

And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel (Genesis 3:15).

This was a promise of redemption through a Kinsman Redeemer. Adam believed this promise and manifested it by naming his wife Eve, *the mother of all living*. Then God added to

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Adam's understanding of his declaration of faith by sacrificing an innocent animal (probably a lamb). This revealed redemption would be by a vicarious atonement, by the shedding of blood. It also revealed the truth of imputed righteousness. The skin of the sacrifice represented, in the typology of Scripture, the Righteousness of Jesus Christ. As the skin of the animal provided a suitable covering for their nakedness, so the Righteousness of Jesus Christ allows the believer to stand before God in Christ's perfect Righteous.

Let us now consider the nation of Israel. There is absolutely no question about the historicity of their faith. There is absolutely no question about the authority of their Scriptures. There is absolutely no question about the Biblical basis for the tabernacle in the wilderness, or of the temple which replaced it. The problem with Israel and Judaism rests in none of these things. The problem with Judaism rests in the fact that the Jews were ignorant of God's righteousness. Thus they tried to establish their own righteousness rather than submitting to the Righteousness of God (Romans 10:3), which is Jesus Christ.

James recognized the historicity of the faith of the Jews to whom he wrote. He recognized they had been the custodians of the truth for fifteen hundred years, but he also recognized that the faith that had once been delivered unto the saints had seen its share of corruption by the traditions of the elders. Therefore he wrote:

What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.

Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: show me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works. Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the [demons] also believe, and tremble. But wilt thou know, O vain

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man, that faith without works is dead? (James 2:14-20)

On the surface James seems to be espousing the very things which we have just seen are fruits from the evil tree. In fact, these verses have been used by every Christian sect (which believes in works to gain salvation or to maintain salvation) to prove their position. However we must remember the context and the people to whom James wrote if we are to view these statements properly. We must also remember that there cannot be a contradiction between one portion of the Word of God with another. So let us go back to where we were at the end of the last chapter.

Remember James had just established that the Jews to whom he wrote were respecters of persons. Since they were respecters of persons, this made them violators of the royal law: thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. It made no difference which point of the law they had failed in; to fail in one point was to be guilty of all. Therefore they could not be justified by the deeds of the law, for by the deeds of the law they were proven to be sinners.

These Jews were not trusting in Jesus Christ and the grace of God for their salvation; they were trusting in the works of their own hands, as established by the traditions of the elders. This then is the basis for comparing their faith which was in dead works, with James's faith which was in the Person and work of Jesus Christ.

Thus their faith was like telling a poor starving man, *Be warmed and be filled* and then not providing anything to satisfy his coldness and his hunger. Their faith was in a system of traditions which made the law of none effect, while it gave them a sense of righteousness. When they were confronted with the truth of the law, as preached by the Lord Jesus Christ in His sermon on the mount, they found themselves totally condemned. Notwithstanding they continued to give lip

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service to the precepts of the law, but they did not and they could not provide those things which were required by the law.

Contrasted with their faith was the faith of James. James's faith did not rest in his performance of the law. It could not. James's faith rested in the Person and the work of Jesus Christ in his behalf. James's faith was in the one sacrifice for sin forever.

James was a Jew. Therefore like his brethren, James had tried to establish his righteousness before God by law-works and the traditions of the elders. However there came the time when his vain faith was arrested. He repented of (changed his mind about) vainly trying to establish his relationship before God by the works of his own hands and put his trust in Jesus Christ as his Savior. When he did this, he came to realize that all of his failures before the law were forgiven. He also came to realize that the law he had vainly tried to keep had been fulfilled in his behalf by the One Who loved him and gave Himself for him.

From that time on, James could freely admit he was condemned by the law, but was justified freely by God's grace. Therefore James could rest in the perfect law of liberty, which is the grace of God. James was no longer a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work. This is the reason James challenged his brethren to compare their faith with his works.

Once again, James used his knowledge of Jewish practices as an avenue to present the gospel to them. According to the traditions of the elders (as revealed in James's statements about the hungry man), wanting to do the right thing was equivalent to doing the right thing. Therefore James pondered the concept, what good is it to tell a man to be warmed and fed if you do not warm and feed him. The Jewish practice, of wishing a thing to be so and then doing nothing, was

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merely another illustration of their violation of the royal law, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.

In contrast to this we have James's practice of presenting the gospel to his brethren as a clear illustration of the works of his faith. Remember, when the Jews asked the Lord what they might do to work the works of God, our Lord told them that the work of God was to believe on the One Whom the Lord had sent (John 6:29). James was clearly working the works of God. His epistle proves that. James wrote to arrest his brethren from continuing in the vain traditions of the elders, and he endeavored to turn them to a genuine faith in Jesus Christ. This was the reason James was willing to compare their faith (which was clearly without works in the fulfilling of the ten commandments) with his works, which clearly manifested the love of Christ.

The Jews could have protested James's concern for their salvation with a strong affirmation of their belief in God. Consequently James wrote:

Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the [demons] also believe, and tremble (James 2:19, emphasis mine).

Whenever the gospel is presented to a religious person, who is trusting in his religious works as the basis of his acceptance with God, invariably he will protest, as the Jews protested, *I believe in God!* James made it clear that belief in God is not the basis for a right relationship with God. Even the demons believe in God, and they will be consigned to hell forever with no hope of redemption.

Belief in God in the abstract never helped anyone. Almost everyone who does not believe in the specific believes in the abstract, and that to no avail. A genuine faith in Jesus Christ is always in the specific. That is, it is faith as it is revealed in the Word of God. This is the reason

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the apostle John wrote:

Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: and every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is in the world. (I John 4:1-3)

The Spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is the Spirit of God. To confess that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is to be in agreement with God about the Person and the work of Jesus Christ, because the Greek word for confess (*homologeō*) means to say the same thing as another. Thus trivial statements about Jesus Christ do not fulfill the meaning of confessing that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. The person that confesses in the Biblical sense of the word is in full agreement with God (God's Word) about the Person and work of His Son. Thus the demons know who Jesus is, but it is to no avail. Likewise a confession of an abstract belief in God is also of no avail. This is the reason James went on to say, *But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?* (James 2:20)

O vain man is the key phrase in this verse of Scripture. The Greek word for *vain* is *kenos*. *Kenos* means empty, having no thing, empty-handed, fallacious, false. Thus this word could not describe a person who is a genuine believer in Jesus Christ. The believer is a possessor of eternal life. He is a possessor of an inheritance in heaven which is incorruptible and undefiled and that fadeth not away. It is a mockery of semantics to apply such a word to a genuine believer in Jesus Christ.

Thus a vain man is the possessor of a vain faith. A vain faith is a faith in the commandments and doctrines of men and not in the sure Word of God. The Jews to whom James

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wrote were possessors of a vain faith, because they were like their leaders, whom Jesus described:

... The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: all therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do: but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not. For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers. But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments, and love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the markets, and to be called Rabbi, Rabbi. (Matthew 23:2-7, emphasis mine)

From our Lord's description of the religious leaders in Israel, it is clear that their faith was a vain faith, with mere outward show and without any real substance. Thus there was no problem comparing their faith to James's faith. This was what James meant when he asked:

But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?