

Dead Works and Dead Faith

#0069

Study Given by W. D. Frazee—December 10, 1971

When we study the Gospel, we are impressed with two things—how *simple* it is and how *profound* it is. There's something here to keep us studying throughout eternity. But thank God we don't have to study through eternity, or even a lifetime in *this* world in order to be saved. God has made the way *simple*. And I trust that as we study further tonight, it will be simpler than ever.

God wants us to be saved, dear friends. He gave Himself for our sins that He might deliver us from this present evil world. He wants us to know as we walk the pilgrim pathway that we are accepted in the beloved. In fact, if we have to go along the upward road carrying the load of guilt and sin, it will wear us out and we'll never get to the top.

Remember in Bunyan's allegory, Christian started out from the City of Destruction, and he went through various experiences going along the road to Heaven. But he was groaning because of the heavy load he had on his back, and he had no way to get rid of it.

After a number of experiences, Christian came at last to a place where there was a cross. As he stood there meditating and gazing upon that cross, the Spirit of God did something for him. And in this dream, as Bunyan relates it, he saw this burden that Christian had found no way to get rid of, he found that that burden loosed from his back and rolled and rolled and went into an empty tomb.

Oh, I do pray that that load will fall from the back of some weary soul here tonight. Dear friends, the pathway may be steep, but the steeper it is the lighter we need to be as we walk it. We cannot succeed, finally and fully, as long as we carry that burden of guilt. The feeling of guilt must be laid at the foot of the cross, or it will poison the springs of life.

There is something about the very effort to be right that can wear people out. Some of the people of this world, to borrow their expression, couldn't care less about questions of right and wrong. In a sense, they can go through life easier than a Christian who is constantly carrying a burden of concern, a burden of guilt, a burden of worry over whether he's right or not. You'll notice I said in a sense.

Personally, I would rather be a worried Christian than an unworried worldling, if there is such a thing. But oh, there's something better than any of that.

“Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” Romans 5:1.

What does it mean to be justified? It means to be acquitted of some charge. A man is brought to court charged with some crime. If the judge acquits him, he's justified. How can a sinner be justified before God? He comes to the law, and the law condemns him as a transgressor. Why? He's broken it. How then can God, who is the judge, acquit that man and justify him? This is the problem. And as we studied it from Romans and Galatians and Titus, we found that there are four keywords that we need to think of in this matter of justification.

The first one is grace. We are justified by God's grace. His loving favor, treating us better than we deserve (Titus 3:7, Romans 3:23–24). This is the *source* of justification. This is where the fountain of justifying love is. It's in the heart of God. His grace. So we never think of being justified in the sense of being worthy of being justified. Oh, no. It isn't that we can present some record and say, "Lord, I did this and I did that and I did the other thing; therefore I want You to justify me." Oh, no. It is what *Jesus* does. It's His grace, His love, His mercy, and His tender forgiveness.

Aren't you glad that's the *ground* of our justification? The worse sinner in the world can have that. The grace of God which bringeth salvation hath appeared to *all* men (Titus 2:11).

The second word we're dealing with is the blood. Who's blood? The blood of Jesus. Can we be justified without that? No. God's grace caused Him to provide the *payment* for our transgressions. The reason God can justify us and still be just is that on the cross Christ paid the debt that we deserve. And the worse sinner in the world can come to God and say, "Dear Lord, I know I deserve to die, but *here* is one equal with the law, equal with the judge. God Himself, in Christ, dying for me, and I present *His* blood instead of my debt. I present *His* ransom to pay for my transgression." Aren't you glad, friends, that such a great payment has been made? We are justified by His blood (Romans 5:8–9).

This is *all* from God. We had nothing to do with making Him a gracious God. He *is* gracious. That's one of His names. Nothing we have done has any effect on that. It doesn't cause it; it doesn't bring it about. That's His nature. We had nothing to do in providing the ransom. The sacrifice of Christ on Calvary is *Heaven's* gift to *us*. It is the heart of God being poured out in love that we might be forgiven, justified freely by His blood.

How do we appropriate all this? We are justified by *faith*. Faith is believing God enough to accept the gift He offers (Romans 3:28; Romans 5:1). Therefore being justified by *faith*, we have peace with God.

To be justified by faith does not mean that our faith *earns* justification. Not at all. Faith is merely the hand reaching out to accept the gift that is offered. In a few days, people are going to be celebrating Christmas. They will give gifts back and forth. If a gift is offered you, and you reach out your hand to get it, reaching out the hand doesn't make you merit the gift. It's merely the way you take hold of it.

That's what faith is. Faith is the hand of man reaching out to accept the free gift of grace and justification offered to us through the blood of Jesus.

While faith is such a little thing, you can see that it's very important. No matter how great the gift, if you don't reach out and take it, you don't have it. And this wonderful gift of pardon and justification made possible through the grace of God, and offered to us because Christ shed His blood, is all in vain unless by faith I do what? Accept it. Faith says, "Lord, I believe."

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life" John 3:16.

Salvation is offered to all who believe. Faith is what enables us to accept the gift of justification, the gift of being counted as if we had not sinned. Oh, I like that, friends.

I don't like to think of coming to God and having to be burdened with all the bad things I've done and all the bad things I *am*. I don't like to think about that, do you?

Somebody says, "That's the trouble, Brother Frazee. I almost hesitate to pray because I think of all the bad things I've done, and I think about how bad I am."

Well then, just quit thinking about it for at least a little while and look to the place where you get *faith*. You'll never get faith by looking at how bad *you* are. Faith comes by looking at how good *God* is, how merciful He is and how loving He is. Faith comes by looking at Calvary and seeing Jesus died, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God.

But now we have one more word in this quartet and what's that? Works. Well, you mean works have something to do with this? Oh, yes. We read that in James 2:17–26. We are told here that a man is justified by faith.

"But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only" James 2:20–24.

Works are the fruit. They are the evidence that shows that that which we have accepted through faith is doing something in our lives. This is all a part of being justified.

[Tape skips here]

We can learn these texts that we went over the other night and that we've reviewed tonight. And we can all say, "Yes, I believe in the grace of God; I believe in the blood of Christ. I express faith, and I will work. But according to the Bible, there is such a thing as *dead* faith, and there is such a thing as *dead* works. How much do you suppose dead works would amount to? Nothing. How much do you suppose

dead faith would amount to? Nothing. We want a living faith, and we want living works.

Paul is writing about the sanctuary service and the offering of the various sacrifices that were used in cleansing the people. He says:

“For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God” Hebrews 9:14.

Notice that we are to be purged from dead works. If we're purged from dead works, will we still have the dead works? No. Suppose we have a dish here. It has some defilement in it. We put it in the dishwater, and we wash it. Then we rinse it. If we've done the work, how much of the defilement is left? Not a bit of it.

God is in the *cleansing* business. That's what this is all about. Paul says that the blood of Christ is to *purge* us, that is, purify us, cleanse us, wash us from what kind of works? Dead works. And if that is done, then we're able to serve the living God. I wonder what dead works are?

Well, let's see if we can learn a little more about it. Over here in Hebrew 6:1, this dealing with the dead works problem is right at the beginning of the Christian life. In this first verse of Hebrews 6, Paul is urging us to not keep going back to the beginning and starting over again. There's one thing worse than going back to the beginning and starting over again, and that is getting stalled and not starting at all; just stopping. Do you agree with me? Oh, yes.

“Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God” Hebrews 6:1.

Here are two things that are at the beginning of the Christian life. It speaks of it here as the foundation. The first one is repentance from dead works and then faith toward God. So right at the beginning of the Christian life, we are to have repentance from dead works. What does repentance mean? It means to be sorry. How sorry? Sorry enough to quit something. Sorry enough to turn from it. That's repentance.

So at the beginning of the Christian life, we are to experience repentance from dead works. The reason that the works of sin are called dead works is that sin, when it is finished, brings forth death. Every sin is a work of death. It's a dead work. There is no life in it. It doesn't come from life. It doesn't lead to life. Every act of sin comes from Satan. It comes from Satan, who is the author of death, and leads to further cooperation with Satan in his death-dealing program.

God wants to save us from dead works. If there are dead works, do you suppose there are any living works? Oh, yes. We'll come to that presently, but right now we're looking at the dead works.

All the efforts you and I make to do right apart from God are dead works. That's all. Jesus says:

"Without Me ye can do nothing" John 15:5.

That's not very much, is it? So if you and I look at the law of God and say, "I've got to try harder, but are doing it in our own strength, that's all dead works. It doesn't accomplish very much but to wear us out.

"For whatsoever is not of faith is sin" Romans 14:23.

Then if you work without faith it's sin, even if you try to do right. So it's written:

"All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags" Isaiah 64:6.

Think of it, friends. Work all day, try hard as I can, without Christ, all my efforts add up at the end of the day to sin, and those are dead works, even if I'm trying to do right. Without Him we can do what? Nothing. Do you believe that?

What would be a good thing to have then before we try to work for God? Faith, because whatsoever is not of faith is sin.

Now I have some good news for your, friends. Back in the early church, there was quite a bit of discussion about whether people had to be circumcised and keep the ceremonies that the Israelites had under Moses. Paul understood that those things were nailed to the cross, but there was a deeper conflict. It was this: How are men saved? Are they saved by keeping the law, or are they saved through faith in Christ? Notice what Paul says:

"For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love"
Galatians 5:6.

Paul said, "All your efforts to find salvation through these various human ceremonies won't help you. All your efforts to keep the law, even the ten commandment law by your own strength, by your own efforts, it won't mean a thing. All that counts is faith, but faith that does something. Faith that worketh." Isn't that what it says?

"For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love"
Galatians 5:6.

How does faith work? It works by love. When we come to Calvary and see the blood falling from the wounded hands and feet and side of our blessed Lord, that kindles faith in the heart, and it kindles love in the soul. And friends, can I stand

there and see Him dying for me and not want to do something to help Him out? Can I stand there and be content to merely know that He died for me, and I accept that as a dogma, as a doctrine, as a fact, and then go on about my way without gratitude and with no response? Oh, no. Faith, *saving* faith, does what? It *works*.

This kind of works is not dead works. No. These are living works. They're the works of life. They come from love, not sin. They are in harmony with the mind of God. But notice that they come from what source? Faith and love. Faith which worketh by love. If your works are works of faith prompted by love, then they're not dead works. If they come through love, through faith, then thank God, they're acceptable.

Now, let's go back to James, the second chapter. We were reading over in Hebrews about dead works, but James talks about dead faith. What is dead faith, according to James?

“Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.
But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also” James 2:17, 20, 26.

Faith that doesn't work is *dead* faith. There you have it, three times in one chapter. But we learned that there is such a thing as dead works, and they're works without faith. So let's put it all together. Faith without works is dead faith, but works without faith are dead works. So either one alone is *dead*. That's what the Bible says. I believe it. What do you say?

I'm going to read something from an article by the Lord's messenger:

“‘Without faith it is impossible to please Him.’ There are many in the Christian world who claim that all that is necessary for salvation is to have faith. Works are nothing. Faith is the only essential. But God tells us that faith without works is dead, being alone. Many refuse to obey God's commandments, yet they make a great deal of faith. But faith must have a foundation. God's promises are all made upon conditions. While we earnestly endeavor to be obedient, God will hear our petition, but He will not bless us in disobedience. If we choose to disobey His commandments we may cry, Faith, faith, only have faith, and the response will come back from the sure Word of God, ‘Faith without works is dead.’ Such faith will only be as a sounding brass and as a tinkling cymbal. In order to have the benefits of God's grace, we must do our part. We must faithfully work and bring forth fruits meet for repentance” *Signs of the Times*, June 16, 1890.

I'm so glad that God has given us a little part in this. Let me make it clear what our part is and what it isn't. Do we have any part in providing grace? No. Do

we have any part in providing the blood? No. These are all the gifts of God. And we do not manufacture the faith. That's the gift of God. But faith, which is the gift of God is ours to exercise. And the faith we are studying, true faith, living faith, is so good it works. It works by love.

Do I have a choice in that? Oh, yes. This isn't something that I just accept passively. I don't lay down and say, "Oh dear Lord, You've done everything and there's nothing for me to do. All I have to do is say, 'Yes, I believe that Christ did it all and there is nothing for me to do.'" No. There is something for me to do. Not to earn salvation and not to merit it, but to accept it and live it out through the faith that Jesus gives.

"All our spiritual improvement comes from God, not from ourselves. In one way we are thrown upon our own energy. We are to strive earnestly to be zealous and repent, believing that God will help us in our efforts. Faith and works go hand in hand. They act harmoniously in the work of overcoming. Works without faith are dead, and faith without works is dead. Works will never save us" *Ibid.*

Now I want you to repeat it with me:

"Works without faith are dead, and faith without works is dead."

"Works will never save us."

[Audience repeats after Elder Frazee.]

Somebody says, "Well, what's the use of working?"

Ah friends. What is the purpose of *being* saved? Why does God pour out His grace? Why does Jesus shed His blood? Why does He give us the gift of faith to exercise? So that we may work the works of righteousness. Not merely that we may be acquitted. Not merely that we may be saved from eternal death, but that we may in this world and in the next, show forth the praises of Him who hath called us out of darkness into His marvelous light.

"Works will never save us. It is the merit of Christ that will avail in our behalf. Through faith in Him, Christ will make all our imperfect efforts acceptable to God" *Ibid.*

Oh friends, this is what encourages me to keep making the effort. Not only does the grace of God provide to cover all our past, but these efforts you and I make from day to day to please Him are sanctified by the merit of Jesus. The precious blood not only covers the past, but it also sanctifies the present as we seek to show faith in Christ by keeping His commandments.

“When it is in the heart to obey God, when efforts are put forth to this end, Jesus accepts this disposition and effort as man's best service, and He makes up for the deficiency with His own divine merit” *Selected Messages*, Book 1, page 382.

Isn't that wonderful, friends? Do you know why that the covering righteousness which we have for the past is something that we can do nothing whatsoever about? I will tell you why. It is all past, and our record is a complete failure. But there is something we can do about tomorrow and today. Not apart from Christ, but with and in and through Christ. We can't go back and live yesterday over again. The only way that the record can be right in the books of Heaven is for the life of Jesus to cover us. But that life that covered me yesterday can be lived in me through the saving grace of Christ today. Oh, that it may be so.

“When it is in the heart to obey God, when efforts are put forth to this end, Jesus accepts this disposition and effort as man's best service, and He makes up for the deficiency with His own divine merit” *Ibid.*

So, fellow pilgrims, as we journey up the road to the Celestial City, let us leave there by the cross the burden of guilt. We are justified freely by God's grace. We are justified freely by His blood. We are justified through faith, and as the result, works will appear in our lives.

We are not to look to those works as the ground of our justification. We're not to even look to our faith as the ground of our justification. We are justified by His grace through His blood. But as we express our faith in what He has done and will do for us, the Spirit of God takes the precious character of God and works it out in our lives from day to day.

And remember, the same blood that covered our failures yesterday will cover even our best efforts tomorrow because we have gotten acquainted enough to know that even after you seek to do your best, you still come short of what you think you ought to do.

Do you know how a loving parent deals with a child who is trying to do a job? Suppose you have a little child trying to help in the kitchen. That child drops a dish and breaks it. What do you do? Well, if you love the child, you'll forgive it instantly. Why, of course. And our Heavenly Father is just so glad to get chances to show us how much He loves us, willing to forgive us, and to cover our poor mistakes. I'm thankful for it tonight.

A number of years ago when travel on the ocean was more usual than it is today, a man was taking a trip across the ocean, and it took most of what money he had to get the ticket and make the trip. He was trying to be economical, so he took a lunch with him. In his room, from day to day, he was munching on cheese and crackers.

About the third day out on this ocean trip, he was getting tired of the cheese and crackers program. Looking in at the great dining room, he saw the people enjoying all kinds of wonderful things.

He called the steward and said, "Sir, I'd like to ask how much it would cost me to get one square meal here?"

The steward looked at him and said, "What do you mean?"

He said, "I just wondered if I could come in here for just one meal. It would break the monotony, and I'd like to know what it would cost me."

The steward said, "Why man, it's all included in your ticket."

Oh, my dear friends, there's a heavenly meal available for us three times a day, or as often as we need it, at the table of our Lord. We can have peace and joy and good cheer in Christ if we'll come to the table that's been set. It's all included in our ticket. When Jesus died upon the cross, He died not merely that we might be forgiven and that we might be saved at last, but that we might have the peace and assurance of knowing that He has accepted us *all* along the way.

What is your experience tonight? What is your witness?

[Testimony service]

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