

Whatever is Not of Faith is Sin

Sometimes you come across a statement in Scripture that seems to take your breath away. Just when you think you are doing fine – along comes a verse that pulls the carpet out from right under your feet. Such a verse is **Romans 14:23**: *“And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin.”*

Whatever is not of faith – whatever does not proceed from faith – is sin. Just when you thought you were getting closer to being sinless by being more reserved with your speech, by being more self-controlled, by doing less of the old habits – along comes the Bible and tells you that even if you do the good stuff without faith, it is sin.

What exactly does it mean? In context, Paul is dealing with the then controversial issue of eating of meats offered to idols. He says that if a person goes against his conscience and eats, he has sinned. Why? Because whatever is not of faith is sin. If the man does go ahead and eat, denying his original God-focused conviction, without reference to God, he has sinned. Scripture is telling us that any action of our life, be it word, thought or deed – that does not proceed from faith – ends up being sinful.

This is because if God is not the point of the action, and if He is not the source of the action, then we are the point, and we are the source, which makes it selfish. If God is not the reason for the deed, and if God is not the power behind the deed, then He gets no glory for it. Whatever does not give glory to God, is sin.

It's sad that as Christians, we have denied this truth, and made this kind of sacred versus secular distinction. We think that reading the Bible, praying, serving in church – these are acts of faith. But everyday stuff, walking and working and studying and eating and drinking – these don't require faith, these are normal things. But Scripture makes no such distinction. According to the Bible, all of life is sacred – and to be lived by faith.

Now, this on the surface sounds very discouraging. It makes the Christian life seem like a mountain – that all of my actions all of the time are to have God as the audience and God as the authority behind it. Is that really so? Well, consider three texts which express this thought, essentially saying the same thing, but with different aspects:

And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ.

Colossians 3:23-24

And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.

Colossians 3:17

Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.

1 Corinthians 10:31

Now once again, these texts sound almost discouraging. Can God really mean that I am to do every single thing in my life with reference to Him? Does He really expect a continual unbroken fellowship

with Him? Well, it seems He does. Consider the number of verses which emphasise that God expects an unbroken walk of faith:

This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.

Joshua 1:8

But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.

Psalms 1:2

Lead me in thy truth, and teach me: for thou art the God of my salvation; on thee do I wait all the day.

Psalms 25:5

And my tongue shall speak of thy righteousness and of thy praise all the day long.

Psalms 35:28

O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day.

Psalms 119:97

Let not thine heart envy sinners: but be thou in the fear of the LORD all the day long.

Proverbs 23:17

When I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night watches.

Psalms 63:6

Mine eyes prevent the night watches, that I might meditate in thy word.

Psalms 119:148

Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.

John 15:4-5

And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint...

Luke 18:1

Pray without ceasing.

1 Thessalonians 5:17

Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer...

Romans 12:12

Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ...

Ephesians 5:20

Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints...

We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you...

How is this possible? How can we remain continually looking to God? The answer is in itself. The task of maintaining continual fellowship with God so that you do everything by faith is of course impossible if you are depending on your powers of mental concentration, your sense of devotion, your diligence. But that would be a contradiction – it would be requiring that we live a life of faith by our own works. Faith and works don't mix.

Indeed, God is purposefully driving us to our knees with how large this task is so that we will turn again to Him – in faith. Faith is yielding to God, coming to God for His resources, and so if this is how we are to live every moment of the day – we see that it is not burdensome. Jesus said: *"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light"* (Matthew 11:28-30).

So this concept of doing every single thing in our lives as an act of faith is not going to be burdensome; it will be a light burden, so long as we do not try and do it in our strength, for our own glory. If we will delight in God getting the glory, then we can yield to His power continually, and enable this continual walk.

But how do I do it? How can I get to a place of walking by faith all the time? Now, it is true that we will not succeed immediately. But God's commands are His enablements. If He commands continual fellowship – making every deed one of faith – He will give the grace to do it. But by following some Scriptural principles, we can increasingly grow into a life of faith, and consequently sin less.

Principle #1 – All of life lived in God's direction, for His glory

Every deed we do must have God as its direction. Consider that everything you do in life has a recipient. You do what you do for someone. Now that someone is one of three possibilities. It is either yourself. Or it can be for another person. Or it can be for God.

The place to begin is to make the habit of giving the most mundane actions of our day to God as the main audience and recipient of the deed. Obviously, this is an act of faith. I am doing, performing, thinking for an invisible being. But this is where it starts – God is the One I do it for.

Sometimes, you do things in your day that are done for yourself, and no one else. That's fine. What makes it selfish, and sinful, is when they have no reference to God whatsoever. Since every deed in our life comes about by the permission of God, it is only fitting that in faith we regard that grace. That's why Paul could say that even eating and drinking – mundane, personal things – can be for the glory of God.

Likewise, you may do things for others, you may and should show love for the benefit of others – but if you remove God as the ultimate reason, you don't glorify God. God has to be the final end for every deed – it is what gives even an act of love to someone else true value. If we do what we do merely for others, without reference to God – we are man-pleasers.

This is what Paul was commanding the slaves in **Ephesians 6:6** – not to be man-pleasers, because it's not faith to work for only the approval of man and the sight of human eyes. Interestingly, Jesus taught that being a man-pleaser destroys one's faith: *"How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?"* (John 5:44). Looking for the praise of men stands in opposition to faith.

Consider Christ's sermon on the mount. He makes it clear that worship is all about a God-ward life – focus your works on being seen by Him. He was teaching that the hypocrites were truly hypocrites because their religious work had no reference to God. They were acts done without faith, not done 'as unto Him' – and that's what made the works abominable. God hated the lack of faith in it.

Your deeds, from the smallest to the largest, must be dedicated to Him. This is the definition of integrity. Doing all you do for God, no matter who is or who isn't there. God is the recipient of the works. God is the judge of the work, the one we pour every act of our lives upon, as demonstration of His worthiness.

Remember **Hebrews 11:6** defines faith as believing God is. Faith makes a mental habit of saying – 'God is here – He is the audience.' I do this not primarily for self, not primarily for others, but primarily for God. Faith starts with a yielding of my every act toward God as the final reason and recipient.

Principle #2 – All of life lived in dependence on Christ's grace

But why should my mundane acts be pleasing to God? Why should me driving and cleaning and thinking and shopping be done unto the Lord? Why should He want that? Why should He care? That leads us to our second Scripture which helps explain how we walk by faith continually: *"And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him"* (**Colossians 3:17**).

Notice how inclusive it is – whether word or deed – everything is to be done in the name of the Lord. You may want to dedicate all your actions to God. But how do you actually do that? This Scripture moves us from the motive to the method. Doing all for God is 'the what and the Who,' this is the 'how.'

You do all this by doing it all in the name of the Lord Jesus. What does that mean? **Matthew 7:21-23** warns us that people claiming to have done things in Jesus' name will be cast out as unbelievers. So it can't be simply doing things, and then saying, 'I'm doing for Jesus,' or even, 'I'm doing it by Jesus.' I think the answer for what this means comes in Christ's instructions in John.

Jesus repeats that the disciples are to ask the Father in His name, and they will receive. Why will they receive? Because the Father delights in the Son, and has given all things into His hands. Therefore when a believer comes to God and stands there, not in his own name, or upon his own merits, but on Christ's – God delights to answer. God answers His Son in us, when we hide ourselves in Him. 'Ask in My name' means, 'Ask depending on who I am, on my merits and righteousness. Unite yourself with that, and ask in that light.'

Christ's name stands for all He is. His power. His character. His reputation. His glory. His promises. So to do everything in His name means I am not facing life in my own name – in my own wisdom, in my own power, in my own resources. I am embracing all that Christ is for me, and living life that way. His plans, His power, His resources, His character is what I use for every deed of my life.

It is as if you put on a large sweater, with the words Jesus Christ on them, and now being clothed with Christ, you must act accordingly. I stand and face life in Him. He is now my life. I am hidden in Christ, so I must continually embrace all that He is to react to every situation in life.

Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.

Colossians 3:2-4

Grace is not me giving to God. It is God giving to me – to get the glory out of my life. Yielding to His grace is receiving all Christ is for my every situation. Christ said it plainly in **John 15:5**: “*For without me, ye can do nothing.*” So let’s turn that around: in order to do anything, I need Christ’s grace. On short, the way you dedicate every deed in your life to God, is by yielding to the grace of Jesus Christ. Come to God by Him for everything you need at all times.

Remember one of the statements that Christ repeats most often is that He came not in His own name, or to do His own will, or seek His own glory. He did not speak His own words, but did everything, every single deed, as an act for God the Father. As He said in **John 8:29**: “*And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him.*”

Christ perfectly did everything as an act of faith to God, and as we yield to His life through us, that we can do the same. Doesn’t this remind you Christ’s message in **John 15** which says, in essence, ‘Abide in Me – for without me, ye can do nothing. Open up your life, and receive my grace for every moment. Embrace my promises. Live life based upon what I promise to be for you, not on your own merits and abilities.’

Galatians 2:20 really sums up this idea: “*I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.*” And obviously to receive the grace of Christ moment to moment, I have to live by faith moment to moment.

But how do I know what Christ’s promises are for my every situation? How do I know what to yield to in every situation? The answer is in **Colossians 3:16-17**: “*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.*”

It’s when the word of Christ dwells richly in me, as I digest and meditate the Word, that I know what Christ is in every detail of my life. “*Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God*” (**Romans 10:17**). You need to know Christ in the Word to yield to Him for every situation. And this is why the wording is, “*let the word of Christ dwell richly in you.*” Let it saturate you. Let the word be flowing down into every possible corner of your life.

Think hard on the Word – find its application for everything. Find the practical outworking of Christ for every situation. That’s wisdom – skilful application of Christ’s righteousness. Wisdom is being able to relate your quiet time to your mundane deeds – doing them in the name of the Lord Jesus. This is why the verses we read emphasise meditation all day. Every situation you confront is to call some Scripture to mind.

Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all.

1 Timothy 4:15

This is why the copious intake of Bible is necessary to enable faith. You can't imitate what you don't know. You can't trust in promises you are unaware of. You can't obey commandments you have never heard. In short – you can't yield to the righteousness of Christ by faith if you don't know what it is.

You need to know in every situation – what does it mean to do this thing in the name of the Lord Jesus? What resource, promise, grace is there in Christ to apply to this particular circumstance of my life? The Word is the fuel you burn in your passion for Christ.

Does this sound impossible? Remember, it's by faith: Christ will do it in us by His Holy Spirit, as we yield to Him. Christ said in **John 15:7**, *"If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you..."* It's not the strength of your devotion that will make this possible – it's His power magnified by your humble faith. Every move in His direction is supplied by His grace. As Paul says:

But by the grace of God I am what I am: and His grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.

1 Corinthians 15:10

It's His consequent work in me through the opening of my heart. I yield to the grace of Christ. I open myself up to what He is by my attitude to His Word. As I love and yield to His Word, I yield to His grace. Now there's a third instruction for how we are to make sure all we do is by faith.

Principle #3 – All of life lived in delight of God

Living life in God's direction is 'the Who and what' of faith, living life depending on Christ's grace is 'the how,' and now this third part is 'the why.' This is why we do it – because there is ultimate joy and satisfaction in it.

Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.

1 Corinthians 10:31

Now think about it. How do I glorify God if I eat and drink? How does chewing and swallowing possibly glorify God? Isn't the glorification of God to be done on stained-glass windows, with an organ playing? I think the answer comes in another book which speaks often of eating and drinking to the glory of God – Ecclesiastes. Many think of this as a depressing book. Solomon would be shocked, because I believe he wrote it for the exact opposite reason – to encourage joy.

Solomon points out that life seems to repeat itself in cycles. No matter what you achieve in this life, death brings it to an end. God's sovereignty decides if the crooked is made straight – and He makes all things beautiful in His time, so you can't make progress in life if God has another plan. Solomon observes that life has seeming injustices, inequities and paradoxes. Time and chance happens to us all. In light of all that, what does he advise? Get depressed? Withdraw? Spend your life on foolish pleasures? No – just the opposite.

There is nothing better for a man, than that he should eat and drink, and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labour. This also I saw, that it was from the hand of God.

Ecclesiastes 2:24

I know that there is no good in them, but for a man to rejoice, and to do good in his life. And also that every man should eat and drink, and enjoy the good of all his labour, it is the gift of God.

Ecclesiastes 3:12

Wherefore I perceive that there is nothing better, than that a man should rejoice in his own works; for that is his portion: for who shall bring him to see what shall be after him?

Ecclesiastes 3:22

Behold that which I have seen: it is good and comely for one to eat and to drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labour that he taketh under the sun all the days of his life, which God giveth him: for it is his portion. Every man also to whom God hath given riches and wealth, and hath given him power to eat thereof, and to take his portion, and to rejoice in his labour; this is the gift of God. For he shall not much remember the days of his life; because God answereth him in the joy of his heart.

Ecclesiastes 5:18-20

Then I commended mirth, because a man hath no better thing under the sun, than to eat, and to drink, and to be merry: for that shall abide with him of his labour the days of his life, which God giveth him under the sun.

Ecclesiastes 8:15

Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works. Let thy garments be always white; and let thy head lack no ointment. Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity, which he hath given thee under the sun, all the days of thy vanity: for that is thy portion in this life, and in thy labour which thou takest under the sun. Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.

Ecclesiastes 9:7-10

Here's Solomon's advice on how to live each moment – joyfully! Solomon is not being sarcastic. He is saying since life is in God's hands – it is not about how much you achieve; how rich you get. He is essentially saying – make each moment of your life count. Life is passing away, so don't spend it on vanity. Maximise each moment by being delighted in God. When Solomon speaks of enjoying life, I believe he means, enjoy life in God. How do we know this?

It is good that thou shouldest take hold of this; yea, also from this withdraw not thine hand: for he that feareth God shall come forth of them all.

Ecclesiastes 7:18-19

Though a sinner do evil a hundred times, and his days be prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before Him.

Ecclesiastes 8:12

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep His commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.

Ecclesiastes 12:13-14

For Solomon, these two thoughts are the same – enjoying life and fearing God. The way I find strength to live each moment by faith is by the fact that it is a joy to do so. The delight that God commands me to have is my strength. *“Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength” (Nehemiah 8:10)*. As I open my heart to receive the grace of Christ for moment-to-moment living, I truly experience His sweetness, and I enjoy it. I see and savour Jesus Christ.

God is not glorified in depressed saints. It’s impossible. Study the Psalms and see what kind of reaction most glorifies God. It’s one of joy, delight, happiness, satisfaction and pleasure. Now, does this mean that I am to be full of gladness at the difficulties and tragedies in my life? Well, it means this: if you continue to live each moment by faith, you can go through those times with your eyes on the Lord Jesus, embrace all that He is for you in that calamity or affliction or difficulty – and indeed, find comfort, and joy.

I don’t believe that this joy is an optional extra – like the cherry on the cake. I believe it’s clearly commanded. When should you *“Rejoice in the Lord...”*? Sometimes? No, **Philippians 4:4** says *“always”* – every moment. Rejoice evermore. Give thanks always in everything. Delight thyself in the Lord. Open the Psalms and count the commands that insist on being glad in the Lord, making a joyful noise.

You say, ‘I don’t have this delight.’ **Then pray for it, and look to Christ in faith.** You won’t find it by retreating into unbelief.

The thing about joy is this: it builds momentum. When you are delighted in God, you are not willing to settle for less. So you push further on in faith, happy to keep the ball rolling of a day lived in His presence. And to tie it all together, when Jesus commanded us to abide in Him, what did He say would be the result in **John 15:11**? *“These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.”*

So every action by faith is done by three things – by directing it to God, by depending on the grace of Christ, and by being delighted in Him. Yielding every action in His direction is ‘the who and what’ of faith, yielding to His grace is ‘the how’, and being delighted in Him is ‘the why.’ Why would I bother with such a life? Because there is no life more joyful. That your joy might be full, says Christ.

If this life lived moment to moment by faith is the only way to please God – and it is; and if anything less is sin, then we don’t have a choice – we must pursue this life. But this life, according to Jesus, is not burdensome or heavy – it is easy and light, so long as deny ourselves and yield to Him. Moreover, it is a life of intense joy, of the closest possible experience of Christ.

So, we need to go from here, and ask God to enable us to drive our cars as unto Him, to cut the lawn as unto Him, to do business, to queue in the bank, to communicate with our loved ones, to teach our children and every other detail of life – as unto Him, like Christ, in joy. Directing it toward Him as the audience, but depending on Him as the source, and being delighted in Him, as the only One worthy of it.