

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior,
Jesus the Christ, amen.

Have any of you heard of Wade Miley? He's no relation to Miley Cyrus, the pop star... He's the pitcher for the Cincinnati Reds who threw a no hitter on Friday, May 7th, just a little over a week ago. For those of you who might not be baseball fans, that means Wade pitched the entire nine innings and the Cleveland Indians didn't get a single hit. It wasn't a perfect game per se though. Wade did walk one batter, so the Indians did have one player get on base, but that was it. Miley's value to his Baseball team increased because of the excellent work he did in just that one game. Professional baseball isn't the only place where a person's judged based on the work they do.

Here's just a few examples of what I'm talking about. First, school's almost out for the summer. Once a quarter or semester the teachers all send out these little things called report cards. Back when I went to school, these were actual cards that were used. The same report card was returned to the school with a parent or guardian's signature and reused for the entire year. On the report card every teacher grades the performance of the student. The quantity and quality of your work determines what grade you receive. You earn your grades... Most of those who are employed go through periodical performance reviews. The focus is on what you have accomplished and how hard you have worked. Back in my Air

Force days, officers were not just graded according to the work we did as individuals, we were compared by our commanders to all the other officers in the wing. The Wing Commander would indicate if this officer was the number one Captain in the Wing or even in the top 10 or 20 percent. These rankings were used by promotion boards to determine which officers get promoted to the next higher grade or rank. It makes for a very competitive environment.

For several weeks now our Scripture readings have seemed to either directly or indirectly raise this issue of Works Righteousness versus Faith or Belief in Jesus Christ as to which system has the power to save us or to make us justified in the eyes of God. It seems as if we're surrounded on every side by the notion that work or even perfect work, without mistakes or errors is what grants success.

In the arena of Personnel in the Air Force when someone is getting ready to separate from the military they receive a Defense Department form called a DD 214. This form summarizes the person's entire military service. This form includes the date the person entered the military and the dates of every overseas assignment, as well as the date of separation. It also includes any special training you completed, and every medal or other military honor awarded to the person. Since this form also includes the characterization of the member's service as being honorable, general, or other than honorable, this form is very important. It's so important that it must be produced error free. That way when a future potential

employer sees an honorable discharge or training in a certain skill, they can be assured the information is true and accurate. Now, back when I first became a Personnel Officer there were no computers on every desk. The personnel specialists had to type them out on IBM Selectric Typewriters. If there was a single typo, the clerk had to throw away the form and start over. There couldn't be a single mistake and no white out... Also, when I got to my first base and was appointed as the officer in charge of the Separations and Retirements Work center the Air Force was also in the midst of a large drawdown, meaning more and more people were exiting the service. I'll never forget the lines of people who were on their last day of their enlistment and every clerk in the office was frantically trying to crank out these perfectly typed out forms before they person's tour of duty expired. They were under so much pressure... Thankfully, personal computers became available before too long and the forms could be filled out well in advance, reviewed by the separating member, corrected in the computer and then a perfect copy printed so the member wasn't spending their last day on active duty sitting in the personnel office waiting for their DD Form 214...

Perfection in our work is a good goal and certain jobs require perfection. For example, I certainly want the people who control our nations nuclear weapons to always be perfect in their performance, but in general, life is much more like the example I started out with, the game of baseball. I mean, a good hitter only gets a

hit about once out of every three times they come up to bat. A really good player might get on base once or twice in the entire game... While every starting pitcher dreams of throwing that perfect game, it's only happened 17 times in the entire history of the Reds... Perfection in any career or vocation is pretty rare...

Even though our society has progressed quite a lot since the ancient times, our modern culture isn't all that much different from what we read about the Roman culture in Biblical times. Roman society was a very class ordered society. Classes were segregated by power, wealth, occupation, and whether people were slave or free. At the top were the ruling class and landowners. They were followed by the merchants who were followed by the common people. At the bottom of the heap were the slaves. People were judged by their power, their wealth and their work. The United States is very similar. We still have classes. It is false to say we are classless. It is somewhat easier to cross classes—if we work hard enough. None of us consider ourselves in the class of the Kennedy's or the Trumps. Nor do we classify ourselves with the homeless or gang members. Much of what other people judge us by and how we judge ourselves is based on our work and the success that our work brings us.

In the scripture for today, Paul is furious at the Galatians because despite hearing the Gospel Good News of Jesus Christ directly from Paul, they have been very easily persuaded by the "Circumcision Party" to adopt a theology of works

righteousness where all Christians, Jewish as well as gentile converts must be circumcised and then follow all the Jewish Laws and ordinances. Under this system of religion, everyone is judged according to their works of the law and only those who reach a certain level of perfection are admitted into the presence of God. It's easy to see how they could be so easily persuaded. It's easy to see how we too fall into the works righteousness trap. We're surrounded by works righteousness all around us. From School report cards to job performance reviews, to our batting averages in simple games like Dartball, we're constantly being judged and graded based on our performance.

Because so much of our lives consist of being judged based on our works, isn't it comforting to know that's not the criteria God uses to judge you? I mean even if all we have to do is believe in Jesus Christ as our personal Savior, I still doubt that my belief or even my faith is strong enough to get me through the door of those pearly gates... When I look around and see the extreme poverty in our world while others have billions, I wonder where is God in all of that... When I see injustice in our streets going unchecked and innocent people suffering, I have moments where I doubt and wonder what God is up to. I know my faith isn't strong enough to carry me through this race we call the human race and land me safely on the other side. Works righteousness, when it comes to eternal salvation should terrify every single one of you. It does me...

That's why I don't rely on my works, even my faith. The faith I rely on is the faith of Jesus Christ. It is His faith that saves you and me from the world, from the law, and from the devil. Our smaller than a mustard seed size faith, could never overcome any one of these obstacles, let alone all of them... Jesus was the perfect lamb who was sacrificed to free us from the demands of the law as well as from the consequences of our sinful nature. It's not my righteousness on which I stand, but the righteousness of one Jesus Christ who completed this life perfectly. There were no typos and no white out. In the end, when the DD Form 214 of our lives is completed, it won't be our achievements written below our name rank and serial number, but the singular accomplishment of our Savior, Jesus Christ who loved you enough to perfectly complete every task necessary for your salvation and mine.

May the righteousness of Jesus Christ wash over you today and once again remind you that you belong to Christ and we are all one in his holy and precious body of Christ, living in the power of his righteousness and by his righteousness we are justified, saved, and set loose on the world to tell of this great and wonderful news. Now let's not be foolish Galatians, let's always remember from where our salvation comes—not through our work, but through the faithfulness and righteousness of Jesus Christ. Amen.