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Christ the King & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Cody & Powell, WY

Quiquagesima

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Text: I Corinthians 13 – Faith & Good Works

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Today brings our sermonic “mini-series” on faith and good works to a conclusion. Saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is the source of all Christian good works. Or to put that differently, only Christians can do good works in the sight of the Father. Hebrews 11:6 teaches, “And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.” Saving faith in Jesus Christ is the only the source and foundation for living our Christian lives in this world in preparation for the world to come.

Every Christian believer, from Adam and Eve to the last Christian born anew by the water and Spirit before the coming of Jesus on the Last Day – is saved by the Father’s grace through faith in His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. We are saved by grace through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast (Eph. 2:8-9). Today’s gospel reading from Luke 18:31-34 highlights what it is we believe about Jesus and His redemptive work. Jesus, the sinless Son of God, was handed over by the Jews to the Roman Gentiles for execution; Jesus was mocked, shamefully treated, spit upon, flogged, crucified unto death, and rose from the dead on the third day. Our Lord did these things in love for His fallen creation so that we, through faith in Him, might be saved and born anew into His eternal kingdom. It is this transformative Gospel that creates good works. The order of things must be kept clear.

A few moments ago, I quoted Ephesians 2:8-9 – we are saved by grace through faith in Jesus without good works. But then vs. 10 completes Paul’s teaching, “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good

works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” Good works follow salvation and they are given to us by God Himself. There is no higher or more noble calling than to be Christian, a redeemed son or daughter of the Father.

If I stopped the sermon right here, however, things would be left incomplete. For I have not yet defined what good works are in God’s sight. Here is a quick, Biblical definition. In God’s sight, good works are everything a Christian does, speaks, or thinks 1) in faith, 2) according to the 10 Commandments, 3) for God’s glory, and 4) for the good of our neighbor.

We have already established the first aspect. Good works in God’s sight are only done in Christian faith. The second part – according to the 10 Commandments, is a short way of saying that the good works given to us by God are defined by His Word, the Bible. Our good works are never self-chosen. Jesus teaches us in John 14:15 that we can only love Him according to His commandments. The apostle John builds upon Jesus’ teaching in I John 4:19-21 where love for God and love for man are linked together by God’s Word:

¹⁹We love because he first loved us. ²⁰If anyone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. ²¹And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.

We cannot love Christ nor can we love one another without God’s Word. The Bible is God’s infallible revelation of His will for our lives. It defines everything for us including the good works He has given us to do. One very concrete illustration of this is that only I can love Vickie as her husband. God has given me that good work. Only I can love my 8 children as father. Only I and Pr. Garwood can love you as your pastor. I trust you can make similar applications in your life. If you are a dentist, soldier, carpenter, musician etc., only you can love those people as their dentist, soldier, carpenter, musician and so forth. These good works are defined by God’s Word.

The third criterion for Biblical good works is they must bring glory to God. I Corinthians 10:31 teaches, “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” God is glorified in us when we are satisfied and rejoice in everything He gives us. We eat and drink glorifying God knowing these are His gifts. We rejoice in family members, in our friends, in this congregation, in our country, in everything we have that supports our physical and spiritual lives knowing God has given them all to us without any merit or worthiness in us. Receive all these persons and things, be they difficult or easy, in faith and contentment. Thereby God is glorified. When a young Christian child hears his parents tell him to carry out the trash and he does so in willing obedience, God is glorified. For that child has God’s command. In carrying out the trash, not only does he love His parents but God Himself. Therein, God is glorified. This is a simple application of the 4th Commandment to “Honor your father and your mother” as Christian.

And finally, we come to the 4th criterion: what is good for the neighbor. I’ve been saying this all along. The highest good is love. Love for God and love for neighbor. You can’t have one without the other as we heard from I John 4:21, “...whoever loves God most also love his brother.” Love, therefore, must be defined, not according to man’s wisdom but according to God’s Word. According to the Holy Spirit speaking to us through I Corinthians 13, the love by which we love God and one another is patient, kind, refusing to envy our neighbors blessings nor boasting about our own. This love refuses to be arrogant, rude, self-serving, irritable, or resentful. Whenever I am rude to someone, irritable, impatient, and so forth, I am not loving God or my neighbor according to His Word and God is not glorified. Concrete applications are readily available. How husbands and wives treat each other. Children their parents. Each of us with coworkers, strangers on the street, and so forth.

The love defined in I Corinthians 13 rejoices in the truth, bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends. This is simply beautiful and life changing. For Christian love says to the beloved, “It is good that you exists. That you are alive. That God gave you to me. And

I rejoice in you, believe in you, endure with you, hope with you, and bear all things with you.” Christian love refuses to live according to lies and falsehood, fear, anger, and hatred. Those vices are demonic. The love of the Lord Jesus Christ defines us. This is the love He gives to us. And this love is what we share with one another in Christ’s name. A sacrificial, enduring love given for the good of the beloved according to God’s Word.

This is a good reminder that repentance is always part of our Christian faith. When we fail to live in love according to God’s Word, we confess our sins, repent, and seek God’s forgiveness in Christ. And when right, we seek the forgiveness of those whom we have failed to love. The Gospel is the power of God for salvation and Christian good works. For we know by faith, the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sins. Having been so loved and cleansed by God, we seek to love freely God and one another.

I close with two passages of encouragement. The first is Hebrews 10:24–25, “²⁴And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, ²⁵not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.” In love, stir one another up for more love and good works! Gathering together regularly in worship guides is loving God and our neighbor. And God is glorified.

And finally, I Corinthians 16:14, “Let all that you do be done in love.” Christian good works are works of love as defined by God’s Word and most perfectly seen in the life of the Lord Jesus Christ. May the love of Jesus fill your lives and the lives of everyone He brings to you.

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.