

The Good Works God Would Have Us Do
I Thessalonians 5:14-23, Trinity Sunday XXII
November 16, 2014

Beloved of the Lord, If God were to ask you, “What is a good work in My sight?” How would you define a good work? This question and answer are given in our catechism, page 129. It says “In the sight of God a good work is everything that a child of God does, speaks, or thinks in faith according to the Ten Commandments, for the glory of God, for the benefit of his neighbor.” I say this because we live in a world, which invents and makes up their own good works, ignoring God’s commandments. There are for example self-proclaimed Christians who will boast and brag about how God has called them to do this or that, but they may hate their own father or mother, or they might be refusing to forgive someone in their life which they truly hate. Such have not kept God’s commandments at all! Likewise there are others who call themselves Christians, but they never go to church or receive Holy Communion, even though God’s commandment says “Thou shalt sanctify the holy day” and “This do ye often”. Truth be told, we all have ways of inventing our own good works, doing them, and then feeling good about what we have done. God however would rather have us look at the Ten Commandments, see how we have broken them, and God would have us repent and pray “God be merciful to me, a sinner.” Only sinners who know and confess they are sinners will find in Christ their perfect Savior from sin. All others who think they have kept God’s Commandments will be eternally lost in damnation. Today’s sermon then is about the good works God truly would have us do.

The Apostle Paul begins today with the instructions that we are to “warn the unruly”. Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly. The unruly in a congregation are those who are insubordinate, disorderly or rebellious in spirit. They are going their own way, doing their own thing, not submitting themselves to the orderly fashion in which a congregation should conduce itself to God’s glory. Wanting things done their own way, the unruly might do what they want to do in spite of the will of the voters, or they might try to get the matter done some other way, despising their own brethren. Such Christians should be warned however the Bible says “Let all things be done decently and in order.” The Bible also says “Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.”

Comfort the feeble-minded, support the weak, be patient toward all men. The feeble-minded are the trembling Christians who are suffering from various fears....fears of the future, fear of death, fear of Satan’s power, or they fear God’s wrath. We are to comfort such fearful souls with the grace and love Jesus gives them in the Gospel. Their sins are all forgiven for Jesus’ sake, and the devil is not stronger than God. “For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him.” I Thess. 5 Even if we die Jesus is waiting there for us on the other side, His arms open wide to receive us. The cross proves all this to us, therefore, “Let not your heart be troubled”. This likewise is how we support the weak. Weak Christians who are going through hard times need to

be loved and cared for, and the Bible says, “We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification.” If you really love your neighbor as Christ loves you, you will be tender and soft toward them, overlooking weaknesses, and focusing more on how you can help to relieve their burdens and fill them with the hope of Jesus...help from above. Sometimes Christians need a hug, or a soft and sympathizing word. They need to know that since they are hurting, we are hurting too, with them. The Bible says, “Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep. Be of the same mind one toward another.” Rom. 12. Jesus said “Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God? But even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows. Lk. 12

Continuing on our Lord says, See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men. We notice here this is true “among yourselves” namely your fellow Christians, and “to all men”. How sad that God must instruct us that when a fellow Christian does evil to us, we are not to do evil back. Christians of all people, who well know they have been redeemed by holy blood, should never seek revenge or payback, no matter how much they have suffered. “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay saith the Lord.” Jesus said, “Resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.” This is the good God would have us do. Isn't it better to suffer loss than to strike back and seek to injure? Isn't the judgment of our neighbor and their sins, a matter we must leave to God? They can't after all, rob us of the riches of heaven. “For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.” Therefore love your neighbor, live in peace, and forgive “till seventy times seven.” “Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.”

It is because “God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you” that you can Rejoice evermore. This means every day and every hour and every minute, you the Christian have every reason to thank God continually from your heart, for all the good God has done you. Ephesians five tells us “Be filled with the Spirit; Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Naturally because of the weakness of our flesh, we will never be rejoicing all the time as we ought, but it is still true we always have reason to Rejoice evermore! After all, Jesus said, “In this world ye shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” If Jesus then wants us to be happy and of “good cheer” for He happily gave His life a ransom to save us, can't we be eternally happy and rejoice in the Lord?

Even when we are suffering in life, there is still good reason to rejoice in the Lord. I want to share with you a wonderful quote I read from Luther last week. Luther said, "If I really recognize my blessings, my heart laughs; and if He sends me misfortune, trouble, and danger, I take to thanking Him and say: God be forever praised for chastising me in this way. Formerly I might have thought that God had utterly forsake me; but now sickness is as welcome to me as health, and a dungeon and prison seem to me a royal hall. For since God is a gracious Father, all this is lovely and precious" What Luther Says, pg. 15, Ewald Plass.

Therefore Pray without ceasing. Prayer is one of the best lessons God teaches us when we are afflicted, for only God Himself has power to deliver us from our troubles. But our prayers must be filled with trust. In other words we should not only believe God has all power and strength to help, but also for Jesus' sake our God is gracious and merciful, wanting to help us and promising to do so. Jesus Himself said, "All things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive." "For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened." In your prayers then dear Christian, and in your afflictions, draw near to God, and God will draw near to you. Your prayers are pleasing to Him and in His own good time and His own good way Jesus is certainly going to give you a good answer. Therefore In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.

Likewise, Quench not the Spirit. Don't interfere with or suppress the working of the Holy Spirit in your own heart. Don't give yourself over to sin, and don't become ungrateful for all that Jesus has done to save your soul. Likewise don't quench the Spirit in your Christian neighbor. Do nothing to hurt, harm, or injure the faith of your fellow Christians, especially the weak, simple, or ignorant Christian. Don't be a Pharisee looking for the sliver in everybody else's eye, correcting others only to feel better about self. Not every wrong must be corrected, nor every weakness. The faith in your neighbor is a matter of the spirit and not the letter, and though the simple Christian may stumble in words, and not be very eloquent or clear in expressing their faith, this believer is precious in God's sight. Children especially are like little tender plants which, must be nurtured and protected and carefully fed until they grow. There are also adults who are simply incapable of understanding the deeper things, but there is an unequaled beauty to their simple faith, which we could rightly covet. As a pastor I have served many such simple Christians and I have to say I admire the faith God has given them. Let us not quench the Spirit by our arrogance or invented superiority.

Despise not prophesyings. God's prophecies are what He tells us about the future. Don't despise His Word. What He says will come will come. Likewise, prove all things; hold fast that which is good. Try the spirits to see if they are of God. When preachers start preaching about their dreams or visions, is any part of their teaching contradicting God's Word? If it is, don't trust them. Prove all things; hold fast that which is good. This means test what you hear and don't just swallow it as truth lest you be poisoned. The devil has far more false teachers in the world that God has true teachers because "many are called but few chosen." Therefore abstain from all appearance of evil. This doesn't mean avoid everything that looks evil, but it means you should refrain or abstain from

every kind, sort, and type of evil in this life. If you yield and give in to sin, soon enough it will dominate and rule your heart and lead you away from Jesus. Keep yourself on the good path of God's commandments and focus on that. That will be enough to keep you busy your entire life.

Finally it is written the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it. This was Paul's prayer for the Thessalonian congregation, and we likewise pray this for one another. May God keep and preserve us all in the true faith unto life everlasting. For if the preservation of our faith was left to ourselves, not a one of us would go to heaven but we would all perish in hell. Thanks be to God His Spirit working through the Gospel Word upholds and preserves us blameless, being justified by faith in Christ, until "the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." For we are not saved by our own faithfulness, but His. "Faithful is He that calleth you, who also will do it." Amen.

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