

LD 24; Luke 6:43-45; II Tim. 4:1-7; Does Grace Make us Lazy? I. Our Works Reveal our Heart II. Our Works Will Be Rewarded

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, why should you do good? If God has already saved you and your works do not earn your salvation, is there any reason or motivation to do good works? The title of our sermon states it simply- does God's grace make lazy Christian? If our good works do not earn our salvation, is it possible that those who are saved will not do good works? LD 24 opens with a consideration of good works which we will bring up again in LD 32- but today we are going to focus specifically on motivation. Can a born-again Christian be uncaring or even rebellious in His Christian life? This was the main accusation of the Roman Church- if we are saved by grace alone through Christ alone- then what reason is there for doing good? The RCC was concerned that this teaching would produce lazy or rebellious congregations which would undermine penance and indulgences. It is a wicked heart that would say- "It is God's job to forgive, so I can live any way I want." In order to get people to do what we want; we have to take the carrot or the stick approach. The way we get people go along with our plans is by either dangling a carrot in front of them- which is the promise of a reward; or by showing them that we are carrying a stick- which is the threat of discipline. Does this hold true in the Christian life? Are we like stubborn mules who will only move when threatened by our master? Sometimes the Christian faith is presented as fire insurance- I do not want to go to hell so I had better become a Christian. But is it possible to be saved and then continue to live any way that we want? This morning we consider this theme: Jesus Christ both saves and renews His people by the Spirit so that we desire to obey and do good.

### **I. Our Works Reveal our Heart**

In our first point we will see that our works do in fact reveal what already lives in our hearts. It is a question of timing- what comes first. Does the fruit make the tree good- or does the tree make the fruit good? Our reading from Luke 6 starts by saying- a good tree does not bear bad fruit- and a bad tree

does not bear good fruit. Just as a guilty convict cannot make himself a pardoned, upstanding citizen; the trees in our passage cannot make themselves good. But God is able by His power to make trees good- and when He does this by His Spirit- the resulting fruit will show what kind of tree it is. If you find an apple growing on a tree- you are in fact looking at an apple tree! So if you find good works in the life of a person- you are looking at a justified saint! When we are justified, we are in fact being united to Christ by faith. Like branches on the vine, the life giving and life changing sap of the Spirit flows through us. We are given new hearts- or made into a new, good tree in our reading. New hearts are filled with good treasures that then spill out in our actions. Good works are a proof of what lives in our hearts. As Luke 6:48 puts it- the good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good. Jesus then draws a connection between the heart and the mouth. Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. In many ways, the mouth and the heart are the closest and most consistent parts of the body. We may be able to restrain our actions in many ways- but the mouth is often the clearest example of what lives within. The true nature of a person's heart is often observed when speaking in a familiar setting- words spoken off the cuff. In this way, the words of a Christian are the most visible and clear indicators that their hearts are in fact good. People cannot see your heart- but they can hear your words! When we think of good works, or when we talk about good fruit, most of the time we are thinking about some action or work that is performed. Feeding the hungry, building homes for the homeless or some other action. But one area that is sometimes neglected is that of speech! Speaking the truth in love- building others up with your mouth- your words being full of grace and seasoned with salt! So Jesus is making it clear that what lives within us as justified Christians will be evident on the outside of us. The fruit of obedience and holiness! Being filled with the Holy Spirit means that we should expect to find the fruit of the Spirit present in your life! As QA 64 says, it is impossible for those grafted into Christ not to produce fruit of gratitude. This is irrefutable logic- apple trees produce apples. And contrary to the teaching of evolution, horses give birth to horses. Well, Jesus by the Spirit has given

us new life- justified- made new and holy trees. Jesus makes Christians- and Christians are holy. Our external life will put this truth on display! So getting back to the question- is it possible for a Christian who has been justified to remain indifferent or even rebellious? The answer is no! No true Christian will be indifferent about holy living- nor will a true Christian remain uncaring about their sins? Why? Because we have new desires- a new will and way! Because we have a new heart- being joined to the living vine! We can't help it- and we can't avoid it! Good works and godly living will be the result of Christ's work within. That is not to say that we are immediately free from sin- or that we will never commit another transgression? No, Christians can and do still sin. However, these sins are contrary to our new nature! Instead of revealing what lives in our hearts, sins are actually foreign to our new nature! They are out of place! Like finding a weed in a wheat field- this sin does not belong and it will be dealt with! Sin cannot and will not remain in the Christian's life- through the process of sanctifications we become more and more consistent with our new nature. As Jesus said in John 15- whoever abides in me bears much fruit. If you abide in Christ, you will bear good fruit! So to summarize our first point, good works are consistent with our new, justified nature! It is wickedness and rebellious that are now out of place as they are contrary to our being good trees. God is not dealing with rebellious children anymore, rather we are obedient and loving sons and daughters! We want to obey because He has loved us! We desire to obey because of our relationship to Him! As II Tim. 4 says, the soldier's aim is to please the one who enlisted him. Our desire is to be a worker approved of by God! We long to hear, well done good and faithful servant! God's glory is our goal! We do not need the carrot or the stick- it is part of our new nature to obey! Doing good is not our way of trying to earn blessings or avoid punishment, but rather good fruit is the natural response and consequence! So the motivation of a Christian is one of thankfulness and gratitude- not fear! But that is not to say that God does not reward those He loves. Yes, this is also true as we see in our second point! Although our good works do not earn or merit anything from God- God still promises to reward those who obey!

## II. Our Works Will Be Rewarded

Now that we understand the grounds and the motivation for these good works, in our second point we consider the rewarding of these good works. If we God does not view our works as merit- if He does not need us to work for our salvation- why then does God promise to reward them? If salvation is not the reward for doing good- then what does God mean when He speaks of a reward in Scripture? The fact is, God is not obligated to pay us for our work- or to reward us for our labor. No, the only reason that God would be obligated to reward us is because He has promised to do this very thing! Listen to Heb. 11:6- God rewards those who seek Him! Or again in Mt. 5:12, rejoice and be glad for great is your reward in heaven. Those who are persecuted for their faith and those who are mistreated even while doing good are promised a reward- to be crowned with glory and honor in the life to come. Consider this illustration- lets say that there is an entitled child who will only clean their room if they are promised a reward first. If the parent does not give this child a dollar, he will not clean his room when asked. That is an illustration of a meritorious reward given to a rebellious child. The child is thinking that they have earned it. But this child is not very loving nor obedient is he. Rather, what if this child obeyed when asked to clean his room without asking for or expecting a reward. He obeyed because He loves and submits to his parents- not because he was looking for a reward. And upon seeing this- the parent chooses to reward this cheerfully obedient child. Although not earning the dollar, this child was rewarded with one all the same! This illustration puts concept of a reward as a gift before us. To say this another way- the reward we receive is less like a paycheck and more like a Christmas present. Any reward we receive is not earned- but it is a reward we graciously receive none the less! So lets be really clear here- what is this reward that we are talking about. The gift of eternal life is not the reward that we are talking about. That is the teaching of the parable of the denarius in Mt. 20. Everyone graciously receives the same reward- just as it is promised. Everlasting life is given to all who are joined to Christ by faith- there is no distinction. However, within the realm of eternal life, the fact remains that there

will be different degrees of reward. Some will receive greater riches and blessings in the life to come than others. We could say that they will have more crowns- or more jewels in their crowns. We find this teaching in the Parable of the Talents as recorded in Mt. 25. One servant receives 10 talents and gains 10 more- to this faithful servant the master says "well done good and faithful servant. You have been faithful in little- now receive much. Enter into the joy of your master." This servant is graciously rewarded for his faithful use of the talents. Note that the gift of the talent and the ability to use that talent are both graciously given. Added to this fact, the servant had no expectation or claim on a further or greater reward when the master returned. No, he was simply being obedient- and he saw himself as an unprofitable servant at that. So the good works that we perform are only works that we are called and enabled to perform. As Eph. 2:10 puts it, we are His workmanship. "We are created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared before hand, that we should walk in them." And still, God sees and He will reward our works just as He has promised. As Mt. 6:4 makes clear, the Father sees what you do in secret and He will reward you. But when and how will God reward you? What is the timing of this promised and gracious rewarding of good works? Well, our QA 63 says that God has promised to reward these works in this life and in the next. The fact remains, every work done in faith and to God's glory will be rewarded. Very often, the rewards we receive remain spiritual in this life. The rewards God has promised us are not bigger homes, newer cars or healthier bodies. That is just not what God has promised and that is not how God works. When we spend our physical riches- or we spend ourselves in kingdom work here below, we should not expect to get physical and immediate repayment in the form of dollars and gold tomorrow. But that is not to say that there is no reward! No, as Jesus made clear in Mt. 6, when you suffer you are and will be blessed! Not only can we work- but we can even suffer for a purpose! We can endure hardship and the heat of the day because we have an eye to the future! As we read in II Tim. 2- the athlete will be crowned in the end and the farmer will taste the fruit of his labor at the harvest! Although we are not motivated by a desire to earn our salvation by our works- that is not

to say that the promise of a reward is not motivating! Even Paul said in II Tim. 4- I have fought the fight, I have run the race and kept the faith! There is a crown of righteousness laid up in heaven for me! Although the reward of God tends to be internal and spiritual today- these will be visible and external in the life to come! And the promise of an inheritance kept in heaven for us should be of great encouragement and even motivation as we produce fruit even in the midst of struggle and trial! I know that there are those here who have and are suffering- take heart- you are planting seeds like a farmer whose harvest is coming above! You are an athlete running a marathon- the victor's crown is waiting and you will wear it soon! The good LORD sees your struggles and your labor- it is not in vain! The LORD will reward those who seek Him- so take heart and endure! Don't give up. As I Cor. 15 concludes, therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

To conclude, can a tree make their own fruit good? Can a leopard changer their spots? Just as the fruit of a tree cannot change the character of the tree- so our works do not change what lives in our heart. First make the tree good- and the fruit will follow! Jesus Christ both saves and renews His people by the Spirit so that we desire to do good. The promise of future rewards both comforts and encourages us as we seek to do all to our God's honor and glory. The LORD sees even what good is done in secret- and on that last day He will reward you and make it known!