

Summer sermon series on the 3rd article of the Creed – July 4, 2010 –
Faith Lutheran, Radcliff, KY
Based on 2Corinthians 5:14,15 & Galatians 2:20
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The Holy Spirit Leads You to Do Good Works

- I. Empowered by Christ**
- II. Motivated by Christ**
- III. Guided by Christ**

There is a story of a woman who was found in a hospital bed weeping after she had been told that she was terminally ill. When a friend stopped by her room to console her, she replied, “I’m not crying because I’m dying. I’m crying because I never lived.” That poor woman realized that it was too late. She had lived a life dedicated to herself rather than to her God. And now she would stand before the Maker with an empty purse; nothing from her life to show her God that she was thankful. What does God say about good works?

Two Sundays ago I introduced the term *sanctification*. The Holy Spirit *sanctifies* me, that is, he calls me from the unbelieving world to be holy (wide sense). Today, we will look at that term again, *sanctification*, but in the narrow sense. The Holy Spirit *sanctifies* me – that is, he leads me to hate sin and to be eager to live a holy life filled with good works (narrow sense). This is what we call our life of sanctification; our life of good works.

You no doubt observe that there are many good people in the world who do good things. They sacrifice their lives for others, they give millions to charities, they volunteer at non-profit organizations to help orphans, mentally retarded, abused women and children, they fight cancer. They are great works of service. But if they are not done out of love for God, if they are not done to thank him, they are not good works in God’s eyes. He tells us plainly in **Hebrews 11.6**, **“Without faith it is impossible to please God.”**

A good work is anything a believer does according to God’s Word. Good works are done out of love and thanks for all of God’s goodness through Jesus. God wants us to do good works, not earn heaven. We could never do enough good works to earn God’s favor. But he wants us to do good works to show thanks. As Christians, we don’t even have to be told to do good works. Good works are a natural reaction of faith.

The problem is that by nature, we would rather do something selfish for ourselves than do something good for our God. Naturally, we love our sinful attitudes and actions and words.

The Bible is very clear that by nature we love to sin. The Bible is also very graphic when it describes the sinful attitude we all possess. 2Peter 2.22 describes our sinful attitudes like a dog that returns to its vomit or a pig that returns to wallowing in her mud. In the same way, we return again and again to our favorite sinful actions and words and thoughts.

This weekend, as we celebrate our freedom as an independent nation, perhaps you might be inclined to read a book or watch a television program on how the founding fathers and colonists

went about securing our independence. But if you hold their actions up to Scripture, it was not exactly what God outlines in his Holy Word.

The Americans viewed that they were entitled to the full democratic rights of Englishmen, while the British view that the American colonies were just colonies to be used and exploited in whatever way best suited Great Britain. Second, the British government decided to increase the enforcement of existing taxes on the Colonists and impose additional taxes, with the hopes of at least covering the cost of the British troops stationed in North America. The American colonists responded with outrage to the new law. They took whatever actions they could to ignore and defy the new laws.

Our Holy God says in his word that we are to obey the government in all things and to give them respect, honor and pay our taxes, because God is the one who established any government or power in this world (Romans 13). He establishes government for the purpose of protecting us. The purpose of the government is to make laws and enforce laws that protect general society. God says that when we honor the government's laws we honor him, since he established that authority. When we rebel against government, as our founding fathers did, we rebel against our God. When we dishonor government officials, we dishonor God. When we omit income on our W2s, when we speed, when we don't wear seat belts, when we disobey the order of our commanding officer, when we slander the name of our representatives, we slander God's name, we cheat him, we are disobeying our heavenly Commander in Chief.

Because of our sinful nature we love to return to those sins, like a dog to its vomit, like a pig to her mud. That is how God views our sinful attitudes toward his representatives. How does Holy Spirit lead me to hate this sin when my sinful nature loves to love this sin?

In this morning's *Verse of the Day* you heard the Apostle Paul say, "**I have been crucified with Christ.**" (Galatians 2.20). Through baptism, you have been made a participant in Christ's crucifixion. Your sinful nature, with its evil desires and passions, has been crucified with Christ Jesus. (Galatians 5:24) Christ Jesus took your sinful attitudes against his representatives and allowed them to be nailed to the cross with his body. There in his body he was covered with vomit and mud of your sins. That's why God turned away. He couldn't bear to look at his own Son, bearing the filth of our sins, of all sins of all people, receiving the due punishment for those sins. But he willingly did this for us. When the Holy Spirit brought you to faith through baptism, he changed your attitude. Since through baptism he crucified the sinful nature with its desires, he also raised you up and created a new attitude within you.

You all confessed this new change in attitude this morning when we read Psalm 119, "**I hate every wrong path.**" The Holy Spirit leads us to hate our sinful nature and all the desires it raises in our hearts. He leads us to hate sin, and to have a new, eager attitude to do God's will. We see this in children. Children respond to something parents ask them to do in one of two ways, "Aw, mom, do I have to?" Others eagerly answer, "Sure mom, I'll do it right away!" That's the new attitude we have, "Sure Lord, I'll do it right away!" But... you and I know that it's not always easy to say those words much less carry them out...

As you review the history of our nation this week, you might remember that the colonists struggled to gain independence, with a war effort that was underfunded, understaffed and filled with traitors. You might recall a certain general who was hurt by Congress's treatment of him and he needed money. So he began to pass information on American troop movement to the British in exchange for money. He even plotted to hand over an important post at West Point, New York to the British. A general by the name of Benedict Arnold. It's hard to win a war with traitors among you. In the same way we have a traitor in our midst who is always plotting and working against our new attitude. The sinful nature... If we have this new attitude from the Holy Spirit, where do we get the power to do good works when the sinful nature is still working against me?

Again, Paul writes in Galatians 2.20, **“I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.”** Christ Jesus is more powerful than your sinful nature. By him living in you, he gives you the power to overcome those sinful desires and passions. This is illustrated beautifully in John 15 where Jesus compares our life in him to a branch and a vine. The only way a branch can remain healthy is by its attachment to the vine, receiving all the necessary nutrients and water to keep it healthy. If the branch is cut off, it will die. Only as long as branches we remain connected to Jesus, the Vine, will we be able to do good works. We stay connected to Jesus and he to us through regular and faithful Bible study, both public and private, through worship, through participating in the Lord's Supper. Christ will live in you and he will give you the power to do good works for him.

So the Holy Spirit has given you a new attitude and empowered you but now... what motivates you to do good works? In the Second Lesson we heard (2Corinthians 5.24.25), **“Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for him who died for them and was raised again.”** In the Gospel, we heard about the woman who anointed Jesus' head and feet with a bottle of perfume that was worth a year's wages. Why would anyone spend \$40,000 on a bottle of perfume? Christ had forgiven her sins and announced that forgiveness to her. She was responding to that love of Christ with her generous offering.

Because of the great debt of our sin that Christ paid to Father, you and I are motivated to render unto God what is God's, and to Caesar what is Caesar's. Christ's love compels us to do so. We will be guided by the Holy Spirit's Word to do these good works. If our God tells us to pay taxes, we will pay our taxes, willingly and joyfully, giving thanks to our God for the privilege of paying taxes. If our God tells us to give honor and respect to our governing authorities, even if we do not think they deserve it, we will give them honor and respect. We will obey our commanding officers. We will pay the taxes they impose. We obey their laws, unless of course their laws violate God's law, then we will obey our God instead. When our politicians make laws that are not for the benefit of society, when bills are passed that are detrimental to the citizens of this country, then we have the privilege of writing or calling our senators and congressmen. We have the civic duty to vote new politicians in. We have a moral obligation to pray for godly men and women to be elected into office, to pray for God to raise up men and women who, according to their natural knowledge of God's law, will bring laws that protect society from the harmful consequences of sin.

This Fourth of July weekend, we will honor God by honoring our governing officials. We will give God respect by showing respect those whom he has placed in authority over us. We will take our sinful attitudes and nail them to the cross, and allow the Holy Spirit to change our attitude through his Holy Word. We will pray that he will empower us through Christ living in us. We will pray that he will motivate us through Word and Sacrament. We will pray that he will guide us through his Holy Word. And then, we will take advantage of every opportunity God gives me to do good works for him. To him alone be the glory! Amen!