

FOR GOOD WORKS

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Presented at Trinity Community Church, San Rafael, California, on Sunday, May 30, 2010

There is so much to be said about the person and activities of the Holy Spirit. In this brief series I have only scratched the service, but I hope that I have emphatically told you that He is indispensable.

The Bible says that if we do not have the Holy Spirit living within us we cannot honestly call ourselves Christians. (Romans 8:9) Any holiness we possess is the direct result of His influence in our lives.

He reveals God's truth to us and gradually conforms our lives to the likeness of Jesus.

He teaches us how to pray and, praying within us, He makes our prayers effective.

I hope you have learned that everything the Holy Spirit says and does perfectly represents the Son of God. He is "God with us." He makes our praises "high" and our worship "deep."

But as important as all of those things are, they are only *incidental* to God's purpose for sending the Holy Spirit to us. Holiness, truth, prayer, and worship share a common goal: to reveal and demonstrate the heart of God toward humankind in concrete ways.

Let me break this down for you.

"God's heart toward human beings" – people matter to God. He is not distant or disconnected, even when *we* feel distant or disconnected. God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son as a ransom for our sins.

"To reveal" – to expose, to explain, to show how much God cares.

"To demonstrate" – to display by action, not merely with words, for a love that does not act is *not love* at all.

"In concrete ways" – God's love is a love that must be seen and felt, not simply considered intellectually. He is a life-changer.

To that end, God sent His Son to provide a ransom to take away our guilt and shame, not theoretically but really.

But if God's love for us is by its very nature demonstrable, so also is our faith response to Him. Mere theoretical faith is no faith at all. Both James and Paul are very clear on this subject: a faith that does not act is dead (James 2:26). Real faith, by its very nature, is demonstrable.

Theoretically, we recognize that faith exists in one's heart before any effort is put forth, lest we should imagine that God owes us something for our efforts. He does not. At the same time, we say that real faith *will make an effort* to please God, simply to demonstrate that it is, in fact, real and not fanciful.

His Purpose

We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them. (Ephesians 2:10)

Therefore, God, who created us in Christ by grace through our faith, created us for a purpose: that our faith should be shown to the world (both the visible world and the invisible world) through our good works. These good works He has prepared for us in advance, arranging countless opportunities for us to express our faith through love. This is the path by which He leads us. This is the way of those who follow Jesus Christ.

From God's perspective, there are no accidents. Every opportunity to do the right thing, to choose the right way, to practice our faith, has been arranged by God. Our eyes and hearts often blindered, we do not even recognize many of these opportunities. Those we do see, we often resist through distractions, selfishness, or rebellion. How we need help!

Be a Model

Yet, we are expected to model the practice of good works.

Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works. (Titus 2:7)

People who observe us should wonder at our goodness — the frequency and persistence of our goodness.

Be Rich

Instruct [those who have this world's wealth] to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share. (1 Timothy 6:18)

Although you may consider yourself unqualified to receive such instruction (not wealthy), by comparison with the population of the rest of the world, the poorest among us is in the top 10%. You *do* qualify. Yet, beyond your tangible possessions, you are to be rich in good works.

The godless imagine that the power to *take* is real power. In fact, real power is the power to *give*.

³⁹ *If someone slaps you on the right cheek, offer the other cheek also.* ⁴⁰ *If you are sued in court and your shirt is taken from you, give your coat, too.* ⁴¹ *If a soldier demands that you carry his gear for a mile, carry it two miles.* ⁴² *Give to those who ask, and don't turn away from those who want to borrow. (Matthew 55:39-42)*

This is the law of love (and faith).

Be Totally Committed

Paul urged Christians everywhere to keep looking up, as though Jesus might return *any* day. This anticipation is also to inform how we lead our lives from day to day, as those who will one day stand before the seat of Christ. He is interested in how we lead our daily lives, because it reveals our faith in Him.

We should live in this evil world with wisdom, righteousness, and devotion to God, while we look forward with hope to that wonderful day when the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, will

be revealed. He gave his life to free us from every kind of sin, to cleanse us, and to make us his very own people, totally committed to doing good deeds. (Titus 2:12-14)

Jesus' people are "totally committed to doing good deeds." Not just for the sake of doing them, but for the sake of revealing and demonstrating God's heart toward humankind. When I do good to someone for this reason, I am saying by my actions, "This is how God feels toward you!"

Keep It Up

Doing good to others can be expensive — not just in cash, but in time and effort and inconvenience. It is natural to grow weary in the pursuit of the good works that God has arranged for us.

This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works. (Titus 3:8)

Let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. (Galatians 6:9)

Therefore, great care must be taken *not* to quit. We must learn to "encourage ourselves in the Lord" and draw fresh strength from Him.

By His Energy

I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength. (Philippians 4:13)

We do not possess an endless supply of moral and spiritual strength. We can accumulate a certain amount, but we must be repeatedly refreshed. Such refreshing comes directly from God, and from time spent with Him.

It is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. (Philippians 2:13)

It is His power at work within us that achieves His desired results. He provides both the desire and the energy when we ask Him.

Acts of the Holy Spirit

This is why Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to us, to live within us and to move upon us.

But in fact, it is best for you that I go away, because if I don't, the Advocate won't come. If I do go away, then I will send him to you. (John 16:7)

If Jesus didn't go, the Holy Spirit wouldn't come. And when He came, He came *to us*. He did not come generally to the world (He was already here); He came specifically to Christ's followers to help them fulfill the Father's design: expressing their faith in Him through their works of love.

The greatest expression of our faith toward God and love to all people is the proclamation and demonstration of the Gospel, for the greatest need of humankind is to be released from their sins. It is in this light that Jesus explains the Holy Spirit's role:

⁸ *And when he comes (to you), he will convict the world of its sin, and of God's righteousness, and of the coming judgment.* ⁹ *The world's sin is that it refuses to believe in me.* ¹⁰ *Righteousness is available*

because I go to the Father, and you will see me no more. ¹¹ *Judgment will come because the ruler of this world has already been judged.* (John 16:8-11)

Many Christians have tried to fill the Spirit's role, attempting to convict and convince people of sin, righteousness, and judgment. But Jesus said that is what the Holy Spirit came to do. It is *not* your job. Your job is to proclaim and demonstrate the Good News by the life you lead, while the Holy Spirit works in the background (in observers' hearts) to convict and convince that it is true.

I keep saying "proclaim and demonstrate," because it is *not* by words alone, nor even by words primarily! St. Francis of Assisi taught his disciples: "Preach the Good News everywhere; when necessary, use words." Words that are not backed by a lifestyle are powerless to effect a change. Our proclamation should serve to explain *why* we do what we do in the *way* that we do it.

Take No Vacation

So the Jewish leaders began harassing Jesus for breaking the Sabbath rules. But Jesus replied, "My Father is always working, and so am I." (John 5:16-17)

The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are always at work, so there is no vacation from the Christian life. Even when you're on vacation, do not be neglectful of the opportunities to reveal and demonstrate God's heart toward people through good works, however small they may be.

And beware of the devil's efforts to sideline you from God's advance planning. The devil doesn't take vacations either.

Bring Honor to God

Don't do good to bring attention to yourself (not even to bring attention to yourself by vigorously declining the attention people offer). What makes it a "Gospel good work" is that it points to Jesus and the Father.

This isn't simply "milk of human kindness" stuff. These are acts inspired by the Holy Spirit to reveal and demonstrate God's heart toward people. Your efforts should help people to understand *Him* better.

Be careful to live properly among your unbelieving neighbors. Then even if they accuse you of doing wrong, they will see your honorable behavior, and they will give honor to God when he judges the world. (1 Peter 2:12)

As the Spirit guides and empowers you, make doing good a big deal in your life. Become an expert in the fine art of doing good. Be ready to go out of your way, when He prompts you, to reveal and demonstrate God's heart for people. Be alert to the preparations God has made and step into them, even if it means getting out of your comfort zone or sacrificing your convenience.

Let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father. (Matthew 5:16)