

Sanctification Lies on the Far Side of the Cross

Matthew 25: ³¹"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. ³²All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

³⁴"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.

³⁵For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, ³⁶I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

³⁷"Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? ³⁸When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? ³⁹When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'

⁴⁰"The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'

The works that are truly pleasing to God are done out of a heart that loves to do the works. It does not realize that it is even doing anything special. What can produce this kind of heart? Will the law produce this kind of heart? No, at least not directly. Only the gospel can produce this kind of heart. Only the news of the undeserved forgiveness granted the sinner can produce the kind of heart that want to do good; even that is unaware that it is doing the good that Jesus wants.

The law's purpose is to show us our sin and make us receptive to the gospel. Unfortunately, the masses of Christianity do not practice the preaching of the law and the gospel. The modern Evangelicals generally teach and preach (1) a conversion experience where the cross is prominent (though even there it is usually not presented correctly) followed by (2) a lifetime of exhortation to do the right thing, the things that God says they should do as Christians. They are told to feed the poor, and when they do it, for whatever reason, it is seen as sanctification. When they are told to preach the gospel, and when they do it, it is seen as sanctification.

However, when an act is done by a heart that knows and feels it is doing the right thing in God's eyes, that it must do the act to please God, it usually leads to a feeling of self-worth and pride. These are repugnant to God.

In the verses below, the people knew of the acts they were doing and thought that they were pleasing to God.

Matthew 7: ²²Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' ²³Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'

Only when the law is preached in its purity will all acts done by sin infested people be seen as inadequate. Only then can the gospel soften and enliven the heart to produce good works that it doesn't even realize are occurring.

This indirect approach doesn't sit well with our present-day success oriented society. We are told to visualize whatever activities are necessary for success; to believe we can accomplish our goals. This method is applied to our life before God also. But this direct way is not the way of the cross.

Trying to play down our works that we think are good and remove them from our minds will not work either. Our prideful and sinful heart will keep track of all these works no matter how hard we try not to. Only the constant exposure to the law and the gospel, including the sacraments that Jesus has established for us to receive this gospel, can produce the unknowing good works and good heart that God desires in us.