

(Basics) 17. Dead Works

by Zac Poonen

The sermon emphasizes the importance of understanding dead works, which are works done for the wrong reason or with a corrupt motive, and repenting of them to serve the kingdom of God with joy and love.

Duration: 13:01

Scripture: Deuteronomy 28:47-48, Isaiah 64:5, Malachi 3:10, Romans 14:17, 2 Corinthians 9:7

Topics: "Cheerful Giving", "Dead Works"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the importance of being a cheerful giver in the eyes of God. He references 2 Corinthians 9:7, which states that God loves a cheerful giver. The preacher also highlights a lesser-known verse in Isaiah 64:5, which emphasizes that God meets with those who rejoice in doing righteousness. The sermon then delves into the concept of dead works, which are works done without love. The preacher explains that love for God should be the foundation of all our actions, as Jesus commanded us to love God with all our heart, soul, and strength. He warns against doing good works out of fear or for personal gain, as God values works done out of love and obedience.

Transcript

And we want to continue our study on the difference between religiosity and spirituality. And today we want to think particularly on the subject of dead works. The New Testament speaks of the works of the flesh in Galatians 5 verse 19.

And we are all familiar with those works. Immorality, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, many things like that mentioned in those verses, sorcery, etc. And we understand that a true Christian, a spiritual person, can never indulge in these sins.

These are known as sins, these works are so obviously sinful, that it would be difficult for a believer to practice any of them without being deeply convicted in his conscience. And so, in a sense, they are not dangerous in the sense of leading us astray. They are evil, but one good thing is that when we fall into any of them, we are aware of it, because our conscience tells us immediately, even a worldly, unconverted person's conscience would trouble him about immorality and things like that.

But dead works are more deceitful. The New Testament also speaks about dead works. In Hebrews 6 verse 1, for example, it says we have to repent from dead works.

Now, in the Old Testament, there is no such thing as dead works. You either have good works or bad works. There is only good and evil.

But in the New Testament, we have good works, evil works, and dead works. Good works are works that please God. Evil works are the works which we just mentioned from Galatians 5.19, the works of the flesh.

What are dead works then? Dead works are works that appear good externally, but that spring from a corrupt motive or are done for the wrong reason. And therefore, they are like a filthy garment in God's eyes. It's like if a person who is filled with leprosy gave you a first-class apple to eat with his leprous hand.

Would you take it and eat it? The apple may be good, but they are contaminated with the germs of leprosy that are in that person's hand. It's the same way when we offer a good thing to God, but contaminated with the wrong motive. It could be prayer.

You could sing a solo in a Christian meeting and your aim may be to get honor for yourself. Well, what's that? A good work or a bad work? It's a dead work. And it's important for us to understand this.

It's well known among believers that the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin. 1 John 1.7 But what is not so well known is that in Hebrews 9.14 it says the blood of Christ must also cleanse us from dead works before we can serve the living God right. So, what does the blood of Christ cleanse us from? Not only sin, it must also cleanse us from dead works.

And therefore it's very, very important for us to have a very clear understanding as to what dead works are. So, let's look at some of the types of works which we could call our dead works. First of all, dead works are works done without any joy.

In other words, works done out of compulsion or necessity or because of the fear of punishment or something like that. You know, you can get your son, for example, to obey you to do his homework when he wants to play out in the field. But you force him to come in with the threat of punishing him with a cane if he doesn't listen.

And he sits down with a grumpy face at his table and does his homework. He's not doing it with joy, but he's doing it. The homework is a good thing to do, but it's done out of compulsion.

It's the way a lot of people pay their tithes. They don't do it joyfully. They do it because they're told by some pastor that if they don't do it, they'll be punished.

They may get sickness in their home and they may have to give it to the doctor or the hospital if they don't give it to God. And so they, out of fear, they pay their tithes. But do you think God is interested in all these psychological techniques by which people are forced to give their money? Far from it.

These are the techniques of manipulators of Christians. God, the Bible says in 2 Corinthians chapter 9 and verse 7 concerning giving, God loves a cheerful giver. In everything, God wants cheerfulness.

The Bible says in not so well-known verse, I don't know how many of you know this verse, in Isaiah 64 and verse 5. There it says that God meets with those who rejoice in doing righteousness. Not just those who do righteousness. It says here, thou dost meet him who rejoices in doing righteousness.

Let me show you another verse. In the book of Deuteronomy, in chapter 28 and verse 47 to 48. There, the Lord was telling the Israelites why they were being punished or why they would be punished in a future

day.

He said there, Moses was telling them, Because you did not serve the Lord your God with joy and with a glad heart for the abundance of all the things that he gave you, Deuteronomy 28, verse 48, therefore you shall serve your enemies. So why did the Lord send the Israelites to become slaves at different times in their history? It was because they didn't serve the Lord with joy. The kingdom of God is not just righteousness.

Romans 14 and verse 17 makes that very, very clear. The kingdom of God consists of righteousness along with peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. So in other words, if you just do righteousness without the joy of the Holy Spirit, you're not really serving the kingdom of God.

You're just fulfilling a legalistic requirement and you can be religious, but not spiritual. A spiritual man is a man who has discerned dead works and repented of those dead works and cleansed his heart from dead works through the blood of Christ. And the only ones who can bring delight and joy to the heart of God are those who do whatever they do with joy, with a cheerful heart.

Take this matter of tithing, which I just mentioned earlier. This was a command under the old covenant. In fact, under the old covenant, in addition to your tithes, you had to give other offerings and sacrifices.

You ultimately ended up giving about 15 percent or more of your income to God. But it's interesting that Jesus never commanded it. The only time he mentioned it is in Matthew 23, when he spoke to the Pharisees, and that was a time when people were still under the law, and he said, you ought to have done this, but not neglected the other things.

But otherwise, it was not a commandment that Jesus gave to people who had come under the new covenant. And that is why after Acts chapter 2, you never find any command to tithe. The only reference to it even is only in Hebrews 7, where it says, Abraham tithed and gave his money to Melchizedek.

Why? Why is there no commandment to tithe in the new covenant? Because in the Old Testament, the quantity you gave to God was important. In the New Testament, the quality of your giving is what is more important. Not how much you give, but how you give.

You understand the difference between how much you give and how you give? In the Old Testament, it was a question of how much you gave. If you didn't give 10 percent, you have disobeyed. In fact, in the last page of the Old Testament, Malachi chapter 3, verse 10, it says, you are robbers, God says, you have not brought the tithe into the storehouse.

Bring the tithe in and see how I will bless you. But once you finish with Malachi, that's the end of it. When you come into the new covenant, we read in 2 Corinthians 9, the Lord is interested in your giving with joy.

And why is it then, so many people are being compelled to pay their tithe reluctantly? It's because of covetous Christian leaders who want their money. And so the people pay up, but without any joy. It's not spontaneous giving, it's grudging, reluctant giving.

The preachers who collect the money may be happy, but God is not. God is not happy because the money is not given cheerfully. It's a good discipline to give 10 percent, that I agree.

If a man says, well, if I don't discipline myself, I'll give nothing, then it's good. But, don't feel that God's going to be happy if you give that money reluctantly. Christian preachers very often love large givers.

But God loves cheerful givers. And there's a lot of difference. You see, the new covenant principle is not give as much as you can give.

No. The new covenant principle is give as much as you can give cheerfully. And stop there.

God doesn't want any more. God wants happy people. He wants children who are happy.

And, of course, the Bible says, given the proportion God has given you, if you give more liberally, you will get more liberally. That's all true. But when you do business with God, thinking that if you give more, you'll get back more, that's a dead work.

So, you see, even your giving money to God is something you may need to repent of. Because you gave it reluctantly. Grudgingly.

And it's so clear. Not grudgingly. 2 Corinthians 9.7. Did you hear that? Not grudgingly.

Not under compulsion. What does that mean? Nobody should compel another person to give. Because God loves a cheerful giver.

Christian leaders are so different from God in this area. Here is one area. A second area.

Dead works are works done without love. You know how when a new couple is just married, the wife may serve. Everything she does for her husband is out of love.

She cooks the food, washes the clothes, keeps the house clean. Twenty years later, you go to the same home. The wife is still cooking the food.

Still keeping the house clean. Still washing the clothes. But it's not out of love anymore.

Jesus said, love God with all your heart, soul and strength. This is the first commandment. If you don't keep it, all your other works are useless.

Think of what the Lord told the leader of the church in Ephesus. All your works are useless because you've left your first love. Think of what he told Peter.

In John chapter 21. When he was commissioning Peter to be his apostle once again. After Peter had denied the Lord three times.

What did the Lord ask Peter three times? Only one question. Do you love me? He said, if you love me, keep my commandments. Not if you fear me.

That which is done out of fear is a dead work. That which is done in love is a living work. You can do a good work.

And yet if it's done out of fear of judgment. Or the hope that you'll get a reward from God. God has no value for it.

He wants us to love. And from our love must come obedience. From our love must come our service.

We've looked at two marks of dead works. We will continue to look at some other marks of dead works.

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