

## God's Workmanship (Part 2)

### God's Goals

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I began my last sermon in Ephesians 2:8, stating that this series is a natural outgrowth of the previous series ["Forms vs. Spirituality"]. That is true, but this is a series on a different aspect of *works*, and it is entirely possible that some of us are going to have to make an adjustment in our understanding of the terms *salvation*, and *works* in order to be more accurate with the Scriptures.

The two most important points in the previous sermon were what God calls "*good works*," and that they are a result of God's creative efforts. I want to just review very briefly Ezekiel 36:26-27 so that you see a concept that is stated so clearly here. We know that he is talking about a time that is yet future for Israel, but it certainly applies to you and me right here and now.

**Ezekiel 36:26-27** A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. [All of those are things that God does.] And I will put my spirit within you, and **cause** you ["Make you." That is literally what the Hebrew means. It means, "I will **cause** you," "I will **make** you."] And I will put my spirit within you, and **cause** [make] you to walk in my statutes, and you shall keep my judgments, and do them.

Is walking in God's law, keeping His statutes, and doing His judgments good? You had better believe it is. But you see, our keeping of them is shown here to be a cause, or to be caused by something that God does. It is an **effect** of what God does. That principle is applied in a different situation in this next verse, but nonetheless it is part of the same principle.

**Proverbs 21:1** The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water; he turns it [turns the king's heart; turns the king's mind; causes it to go in a certain direction; makes it go in a certain direction] whithersoever he wills.

Not where the king wills, but where **God** wills. God, as Supreme Ruler controls and manipulates earthly political powers. Some people feel uncomfortable with that concept, thinking that it smacks of predestination, or when it is applied to you and me that it turns us into puppets. But I want to ask you something. Who knows better than God what to do to bring His plan, His goal—the goal that He wishes—to fruition, whether it be a nation or whether it be a person? Is not that the same that any artist or craftsman or creator does in order to bring forth what he envisions? That was one of the main points in my sermon the last time. God **causes**, and the effect is *good works*.

The second point is that Ephesians 2:8 is written in the perfect tense, and as we are going to see later in this sermon, it is not the only verse that is written showing that salvation is in a peculiar time position to our normal way of thinking. The perfect tense means that salvation was completed in the indefinite past, and its effects were continuing at the time of the writing. That might immediately make a person think of the "once saved, always saved" doctrine of Protestantism, or perhaps even of predestination. But brethren, be patient, because we are not finished yet. Let us go back to the scripture that I was on whenever the sermon last week ended.

**Philippians 2:12-13** Wherefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, For it is God which works in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure.

Did you catch that? It is **God** who works in you to bring forth His good pleasure.

**Philippians 2:14-15** Do all things without murmurings and disputings: That you may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom you shine as lights in the world.

Let us go back to verse 12. *Work out* seems to be the phrase or the word that people may have a problem with, but when translated into the English, it has the sense of *exhibit*. "*Exhibit* your own salvation," or "*Express* your own salvation," or "*Carry out*." I am going to interpret here: "*Carry out* what you already possess." That is a bell-ringer. It is saying that you **possess** salvation. "Carry it out," he says.

Verse 13 is intended by Paul to be a note of encouragement because it shows us that salvation is not so much our work as it is God's. "For it is God which works in you." That word means *energizes*. "*For it is God which energizes you.*"

The reason Paul wrote this as a point of encouragement was to tell us by inference, that because God is energizing us, what He has **asked** of the people—that they work their own salvation in fear and trembling—has every chance of success because God is in it. God is energizing us. He is saying that God influences us, *both to will* (have the desire), and *to do* (accomplish). God not only calls us, He works on us and **in** us to the very end that He is creating. *We are His workmanship*. He is the artist. He is the craftsman preparing us for His Kingdom. What He is looking for in you and me is cooperation. "**Carry it out!**" He is asking for cooperation—yielding to His purpose so that He can bless.

What we are going to do is go back into Philippians 1:27, and we are going to pick this thing up in its context so that you can see how He led the people step by step into His admonition, His command, that they *work it out*. We will not go through it in great detail, but in verse 27 he says, "Only let your conversation [conduct] be as it becomes the gospel of Christ." This is what they were to **aim** for in their lives. He is saying "Conduct your life as a citizen of the Kingdom of God should."

In chapter 2 he begins to get into a specific situation, because this congregation that he loves so much was having a problem. They were having trouble unifying. In fact, we know the names of two ladies who were apparently feuding. Everybody in the congregation knew their names. (They are named in chapter 4.) There were others, because I think they were taking up sides. The issue here was unity. And so in Philippians 2:1-4, he gives those people four reasons why they should be able to live in peace and harmony.

Then, in order to give us—let us put ourselves right into it—good patterns to yield to, in verses 5-8 he shows us Christ's example. He shows us how Christ exhibited the basic quality of unity. Do you know what the basic quality of unity is? It is *humility*—self-abnegation. That is the background of the context. He is saying they should be able to unify. Then in verses 12-13 he exhorts us to *exhibit, express, manifest* the same humility. "**Carry it out**," he says, "*that Christ did in His life.*" "**Work it out.**" "**Express it,**" he says. "*Express the salvation you have in your lives.*"

Why is salvation a matter of fear and trembling? The reason is because we do not know all the sacrifice that is going to be required of us in order to submit to God's will. It is simply another way of saying *be sober and serious about your responsibilities to God*. If we examine the whole book, we begin to find that for the Philippians to sacrifice themselves in humility to God in order that there might be peace and harmony within the congregation, it was probably going to involve conflict.

In addition to that, Paul gives other examples. For Jesus, it involved death. For Paul himself, it involved imprisonment. For Timothy, who is also named in the letter, costly sacrifice in service to the church. For Epaphroditus, who is also named in the book, physical illness. This is **not** working *for* salvation, because even as these verses imply very strongly, salvation is overwhelmingly **a work of God**. "For it is **God** that works in you both to will and to do." Salvation is a work that God does **for** us.

I am going to make this really clear. The nation Israel is the prime example of a people who were **saved**. Who got them out of Egypt? **God did it!** He

did the **whole** thing. Salvation is something God does, and so we are not working **for** salvation. Works have an entirely different purpose in God's plan. Salvation is something God does. **He** is the Savior. **He** saves. Brethren, He created the earth. He created us. He came up with the plan. He provided Jesus Christ. He called us out. He leads us to repentance. He forgives. He gives His Spirit. He gives us the manna and the water along the way. He fights our battles. He creates us in His image, and finally **He** resurrects us, and **He** gives us His glory. And we think what little we do is so hard.

Think about this. Think about what I just said.

**Philippians 2:13** For it is God which works in you both to will and to do, . . .

Plus doing all the creating, the calling, the giving of His Spirit, granting us repentance. Therefore, Paul says in verse 14:

**Philippians 2:14** Do all things [everything] without murmurings and disputings.

Do you think that the Philippians were murmuring and disputing? You had better believe that they were. That is the purpose of this letter. So since God, by **His workmanship** is producing the willing and the doing of **His** good and perfect will, there is no legitimate reason for murmuring and disputing. Not only are we forbidden to complain about the difficulties and persecutions that will befall us in carrying out God's good pleasure, but quarreling among ourselves is also prohibited.

Verse 15 points to something that is going to be accomplished if we follow Paul's instructions in verses 12, 13, and 14. Here is the fruit that will be produced:

**Philippians 2:15** That you may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom you shine as lights in the world.

Now here is the hope: If we will obey the instructions given in verses 12-14, we will become blameless, meaning that no finger of accusation can justly be pointed at us because God knows. In addition to that, we will become harmless. It means we will become morally pure, and in this way we can live without rebuke; that is, without incurring any spiritual damage, and therefore we can be a proper witness for God in this world.

Brethren, everywhere we look in God's Word, we see this same enormously important principle set forth—that what we do in terms of good works is always an effect of what **God** does. It is like a ricochet. There is *cause*, what **God** does; and there is *effect*, what **we** do. The amazing thing about this is that we are not seen in the Bible as puppets on a string because God manages to do what He does in such a way that He causes us to **voluntarily** yield to Him. He manipulates and works events until we think it is **our** idea to obey. And it is, by that time. So then, of our own free will we choose to do the right thing.

What then is salvation? Salvation is something that is done **in** us. It is synonymous with the divine creation. It is not something that we get because completely on our own we decide to do something about our lives spiritually, but something we become as a result of God's workmanship.

You remember that verse, do you not, in John 6:44? “No man comes to Me except the spirit of the Father draw him, and I will raise him up at the last day.” That verse merely points to the beginning of this process that we call salvation, because God calls, and He draws us. What do we do? We react. We react in a *good work*. It is something that we **never** would have done. No man can come to Christ except the Spirit of the Father **draw** him. Nobody would ever come to Christ unless God acted first. And then we merely **react** by doing something that is good.

We are beginning to come, slowly but surely here, to understand what a *good work* is to God. A *good work* is nothing more than a **reaction** to the **cause** that God is working toward. God calls, we react, and that is good. It is good

for us, and it is good for His purpose. So we believe, and we begin to take up the challenge and follow Him. And then He leads us to repentance (Romans 2:4).

Then what do we do? We repent. It is a direct result of what God leads us to do. Then what do we do? We get baptized, see. That is another good work. Then God gives His Spirit, and here the process really begins to get rolling in a serious manner, because by His Spirit we are led into **all** truth.

So God reveals truth by His Spirit, and God creates circumstances or uses circumstances to bring things to our attention that require a choice, and if we have the faith, and if we really love Him, we will keep on reacting to do the right thing—doing *good works* which He is putting in our minds to do. He puts the desire to **obey** Him in our minds, and then giving us the gifts and power to be able to do it. *For it is God who works in you both to will and to do.*

Now let us look at a scripture in Ephesians 3. It is a telling declaration that Paul makes about himself.

**Ephesians 3:1-2** For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, if you have heard of the dispensation [stewardship or responsibility] of the grace of God which is given **me** to **you-ward**. How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words) . . .

**Ephesians 3:7** Whereof I was **made** a minister . . .

What was he made a minister by? By the calling of God, by the dispensation of the grace of God, by the revelation of God, by the gifts of God.

**Ephesians 3:7** Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of His power.

Brethren, it was God who made Paul a minister by gifting him with what he needed to be effective. Paul responded. Now, what I am saying at this point

may oversimplify the process, but it does, I think, make what is happening to us—you and me—very clear because what happened with Paul has happened to everyone of us.

God places us in the body as He sees fit (I Corinthians 12). God places us in the body where **He** sees fit, even as He placed Paul in the body as an apostle, as God saw fit. And so He then **gifts** us, like He did Paul, to carry out, to work out, to exhibit, to express, to manifest our place in the body. Paul became, and he did the works as an apostle, in and for the benefit of the church, as a result of what God did. Now what is wrong with that, brethren? Is that predestination? Well, I will let you answer that for right now.

The object of God's workmanship in us is *good works*; therefore, good works cannot be the cause of salvation, but the effect of His creative workmanship. Works therefore are most definitely part of the creative process, but there is still no absolute guarantee that we will react correctly. There is the catch, because God allows human nature an escape hatch, and there is a reason for that.

Let me give you an analogy from our human condition that I think will help illustrate at least the beginning of the process—the spiritual process. How much does a newborn baby have to do with the fact that it is what it is? Does it conceive itself in its mother's womb? No. The conception is entirely the result of the action of the father and mother, something completely apart from the baby. The baby had absolutely nothing to do with it. As the birth process continues, the baby does not will the cells to form into what will eventually become the child. Nor does the embryo, and later the fetus, have anything to do with the food being available so that cells can be energized. In fact, in this process, it does not even feed itself.

Now the human birth analogy is not perfect, but it does give us a little bit of a sense of how little a role the baby plays in its part of the birth process, and we can at least see somewhat the spiritual birth process as well. It is right here and in Ephesians 2:10 that something else fits in, another aspect. (I will get to that a little bit later.)

"We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus." A baby is somebody else's workmanship, created **in** the mother. We are described by the Bible as being "*in*" Christ Jesus. Now "*in* Christ Jesus" means *in union with*, or *joined with*. This concept is drawn so closely in the Bible that we are shown to be a part of Christ's body, drawing nourishment from Him—just like a baby draws nourishment from the mother—and involved in some of the **same** operations as Christ, but to a much lesser degree than He is.

**Ephesians 1:22-23** And [God] has put all things under His [Christ's] feet, and gave Him to be the head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him that fills all in all.

We are a part of the body of Jesus Christ. Turn to John 15. I want you to see this because it illustrates how closely this "*in union*" with Christ is shown in the Bible.

**John 15:1-2** I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that bears not fruit he takes away, and every branch that bears fruit, he purges it, that it may bring forth more fruit.

I think that you understand that in the illustration that Christ is giving here, that you and I are the branches that are attached to the vine.

**John 15:5** I am the vine, you are the branches; He that abides in me, and I in him, the same brings forth much fruit: for without me you can do nothing.

We are talking about something that is very serious indeed in reference to works. In terms of activities, or works, or the producing of fruit, unless we are **in** Christ, unless we are drawing from Him the spiritual strength and nourishment that we need, we simply will not be there. We will never be able to do the good works that God requires of us. Our dependence on Him is **absolute**. I cannot make it any stronger. It is **absolute**!

Without our connection to Him, there will be no good works. That ought to begin to tell you something about when good works begin. Good works, as God defines them, do not begin until we are *in Christ*. Then we become capable of doing good works. That might be shocking to some people. All the good that we might have done before we were ever converted, God says, is **filthy rags**. It is of **no** value to the Kingdom of God. Not **any** of it!

Now that does not mean that we should discourage people who are unconverted who are doing good works. There is a reason why God will not accept them, and I am awfully glad that there are people out there in the public who are doing humanitarian things in man's behalf. But as far as the Kingdom of God is concerned, they are useless because our creation to do good works does not begin until God begins living in us.

So as I said earlier, our understanding of the term *salvation* has to be expanded, and our understanding of the term *good works* has to be narrowed in order to be more correct with the Scriptures. We are God's workmanship, and our works are directly an effect, a product of what God does. It is He that takes the initiative in order to produce the end result, because only He knows exactly where He is headed, and where He wants to fit each piece into His creation. I am going to give you some evidence of this so that you will understand this part a little bit clearer.

**I John 3:2** Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it does not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him.

What Paul is saying is that we know a generality. We are going to be God, we are going to be sons of God, we are going to be in the Family of God, but exactly, precisely, specifically **where** we are going to fit into the picture of the structure that He is forming for governing the world tomorrow and expanding His name, His family, and everything all over God's great creation, we do not know yet.

Does not that same principle at least apply in some respects to when a human child is born? Do we know then what that child is going to become? Is that

child going to be an engineer? Is that child going to be a doctor? Is that child going to be an attorney? Is that child going to be a mechanic? What is that child going to be? Are there not parents, who with good intentions, begin to try to shape their children to go into a certain direction? Sure they do, and there is nothing wrong with that unless it is abused. There is nothing wrong with that unless the parent tries to bend the child into areas where he is not suited for.

You see, God is a perfect parent. He knows exactly what we are suited for. He knows exactly the end toward which He is taking us. He and He only knows that specific end, and so He, in His mercy, is creating us to fit into that. I will tell you, when you get into the Kingdom of God, you are going to **love** your job. It is going to fit you perfectly, because the great Creator is molding and shaping you, like a master artist, to fit into it.

There are other scriptures. Paul says *We look through a glass darkly*. There are others that show this very clearly. We do not know, except vaguely, generally, the end toward which we are being drawn.

Let me ask another fairly broad question. We are going to see in Jesus' own words *Why did He come?* Why did He become a man? What was the ultimate purpose for it? You know, He gave the answer. I thought it was interesting, and maybe God-inspired, that when Mr. Armstrong died, they came out with the special issue of the *Plain Truth* dedicated to Mr. Armstrong. Do you know what the lead article was? They hit the nail right on the head.

**John 10:10** The thief comes not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come [Here it is] that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.

There is why Christ came. Now we already have life, but the life that He is referring to is eternal life. Eternal life is quality of life—“*Have it more abundantly.*” It is life lived the way God lives, and that includes living without end, and so there has to be a quality of life that goes with eternity in order for it to be enjoyable and profitable in every way. Human nature

dominating life is what produced this crushing, enslaving, anxiety- and disease-ridden quality of life that is now being lived everywhere on earth. In addition to that, it is producing death, because it is so self-centered.

Let us go back to James 3. This instruction that James is giving here is most specifically intended for a teacher.

**James 3:9-12** Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceeds blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be. Does a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter? Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries? Either a vine, figs? So can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh.

The instrument that James is referring to that produces this mixture of good and evil is the *tongue*, but the fountain from which it flows forth is *human nature*. Out of the heart the mouth speaks, see. It is the heart that is the source of what the tongue says. It is the heart—human nature—which is the fountain from which flows what the tongue says. Works is what the tongue produces. Works, motivated by this mixed bag—human nature (a mixed bag of good and evil)—are not acceptable to God's Kingdom, because the overall effect is bad, it is evil.

**James 3:13** Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? Let him show out of a good conduct his works with meekness of wisdom.

Godly wisdom, wisdom generated by a heart dominated by God's Spirit. God, in His wisdom, mercy, and grace, determined before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1) that the only way to create sons in His image—a whole family of beings like Him who could live abundantly in harmony for all eternity—was to allow the natural birth processes that He created to unfold and then, at a time suitable to Him, open our minds to an awareness of Him and His spiritual purpose, and make us partakers of the divine nature by giving us His Spirit.

**II Peter 1:2-4** Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord. According as his divine power [Notice how this leads off. It is what **God** does.] has given unto us all things that pertain unto life. ["I am come that they might have life—abundant life."] and godliness, through the knowledge of him [That knowledge comes by revelation (I Corinthians 2), something that He gives by His Spirit.] that has called us to glory and virtue; whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these you might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

**I Peter 1:3** Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy has begotten us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

The reference is to the resurrection, because this is how God showed His power to be able to carry through in what He has promised to you and me. That is the down-payment. That is what gives us the hope that God's plan will not come to end at death.

**I Peter 1:4** To an inheritance incorruptible . . .

That is, to go along with, to be in accordance with, to be on a level and agreement with the eternal life that we are going to be living.

**I Peter 1:4-7** . . . And undefiled, and that fades not away, reserved in heaven for you. [What confidence there is there!] Who are kept [guarded, reserved] by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. Wherein you greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, you are in heaviness through manifold temptations: That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perishes, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.

Having experienced living in this world dominated by human nature, God's calling sets conditions and gives us reasons whereby we must choose to use

the powers of His nature to overcome human nature in ourselves. This is not easy, as all of us have discovered, but it is well worth every ounce of energy and time that we put into it. Since it is God who is working **in** us, *to will, and to do*, there is no excuse. He has us boxed into a corner. Believe me, because He loves us so much, if He cannot persuade us through His Word, He will give us the 2 x 4 upside our head. He will do whatever it takes to bring us to the place where we will voluntarily submit to Him for our own good. But He will not save us if we continue to resist. He has allowed human nature that out.

**Romans 8:1** There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus. [In union with; part of His body.] Who walk [who conduct their lives] not after the flesh, [not after human nature] but after the Spirit.

This is why He has given us His Spirit. This is why we have the divine nature, so that we will be able to draw on its powers. He will educate us, He will give us vision, He will give us hope. He will give us the power to do it.

**Romans 8:2** For the law of the Spirit of life in [as a part of, in union with] Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.

We do not have to obey human nature any more. That is the law of sin and death. God is doing **everything** He possibly can, without taking the right of choice away from us.

**Romans 8:9-11** But you are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of His. And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. [Because the righteousness of Christ has been applied to us.] But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwells in you.

Paul is so confident that God can do what He has set out to do that he wrote that in the way he did, and the way he wrote it is that God *is* going to resurrect us. But be patient. We are not done yet.

**Romans 8:12-13** Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. For if you live after the flesh, you shall die.

If we allow human nature to dominate us as it dominated and held us enslaved before God called us, **we shall die**. That does not sound like “*once saved, always saved*.”

**Romans 8:13-14** But if you through the spirit do mortify [put to death] the deeds of the body, **you shall live**. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.

Brethren, the receiving of God's Holy Spirit is a tiny spark of life—the very life force of Jesus Christ—and it sets off the process we call *salvation*. *We already have it!* Do you understand that? Salvation **is** synonymous with *the new creation*. They are transferable terms. Now I want you to see this in II Corinthians 5:17.

**II Corinthians 5:17** Therefore if any man be *in* Christ [in union with] he is a new creation.

And he is a new creation because he has the spirit of life in him, and that life **is eternal**.

**II Corinthians 5:17** Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.

Again, even though these things are so confidently asserted by God's apostle, we can still allow human nature to dominate us. See, now you have a choice. So, salvation is *creation*, because it is a process.

In the typology given in the Old Testament, Israel was not removed from their bondage and put into their inheritance in the blink of an eye. Yet God is so faithful to His promises and so great in wisdom and power, that in that sense, even though we still have the opportunity to reject God's gracious efforts, the Bible writers already considered it **done**. *Is anything too hard for the Lord?* God Himself asked that question. He can even save us. Thus when the apostles wrote, they very frequently wrote of *saved* in the perfect tense—*already completed!*

Let us summarize to this point:

1) Works are not the cause of salvation. They are the effect of God's creative efforts to bring us into His image. They are the effect of the new creation.

2) We are created in Christ Jesus. We are given a tiny spark of His very nature, to draw our spiritual nourishment and power to act from Him, so that here again works are seen as coming from a source not natural to us, something that we do not have by nature. *Works* are the effect of Christ's nature in us. Good works are nothing more than our puny efforts to respond to God's love by voluntarily living life the way God does.

We are going to go back to Ephesians 2:8, and we are going to start off a detailed section here, but it is an important angle to this subject, and it needs to be covered in more depth.

**Ephesians 2:5** Even when we were dead in sins, [God] has quickened us [made alive] together with Christ, (by grace you are saved;).

**Ephesians 2:8-10** For by grace are you saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God has before ordained that we should walk in them.

That last phrase is interesting. Do you know that God predestinated the kinds of works that He wanted from us? And He did.

That phrase in Ephesians 2:5 and 8, "*are you saved*" was written by Paul in the perfect tense. If you look up that definition of *perfect tense*, the explanation will be something like this:

From *The Reader's Digest Encyclopedic Dictionary*, "Denoting the tense of a verb expressing action completed in the past."

The verb is *saved*, and it is saying that it is completed in the past. That is pretty clear.

Just in case you are doubtful, here is the definition given by *Webster's*: "Constituting a verb form, or verbal, that expresses an action or state completed at the time of speaking, or at a time spoken of."

A little bit different, but it still amounts to exactly the same thing.

When Paul wrote Ephesians 2, he did not name any time, and so "at the time spoken of," salvation was completed.

The definition that I gave at the beginning of my last sermon came from *McClaren's Commentary*. It was more specific, clear, and accurate to the overall context of this subject. I will give it to you again: "They were spiritually saved at some point in the past, and remained in that state at the time of the writing."

Brethren, that is **not** a "Once saved, always saved" statement. Ephesians 2:8 does not say that they will always remain in that state. It says that at the time, they were still saved. Another way of putting it would be that as long as they continue as they were, their salvation is assured. It was as good as done.

Paul's purpose at this point is not to emphasize salvation per se. The Greeks had a form of writing that is called *emphatic*, and so what they did is they arranged their sentences and wrote in such a way so the emphasis the writer intended was very clearly delineated. It was called *emphatic*, almost you

might say the way Mr. Armstrong wrote, with all caps, bolds, italics, and all kinds of things like that. They had a style of writing that was very similar to that.

When Paul was writing this, his emphasis was not on salvation. His emphasis was on **works**. And what he says is that works do not earn salvation; they are the effect of God's workmanship. They are always the effect of what God does; what the Creator does; what the Potter does. And so the concept is similar to what happens to a piece of marble in the hands of a sculptor, a piece of wood in the hands of a carpenter, or concrete or metal in the hands of a construction worker. The potter, the artist, the craftsman does the shaping.

We are God's workmanship, created unto good works. We are created for the purpose of good works. *Good works* are an end result, Paul is saying here, and therefore *good works* cannot be the cause of something (salvation) that occurred before they were ever brought forth by the Master Potter.

So brethren, what we tend to understand about the terms *salvation* and *good works* are not exactly what God means, because we have the tendency to think of salvation only as what occurs at the **end**, when we will be resurrected and inherit the Kingdom of God. Now that is partly true, but as we are seeing, the apostles wrote of salvation as something that happened in the indefinite past. Salvation is more accurately understood as the whole creative process, because we are saved, delivered from more than death. Do you understand that?

In one sense brethren, delivering us from the death penalty is the least of God's worries. **It is exceedingly harder to create His image in us.** That requires *scores of years* in most cases, but He could resurrect us in the blink of an eye. That is no problem for the great God. The problem for the great God is to get us to the place where our lives are dominated by His Spirit, not dominated by human nature and allow free moral agency to have its sway. **That is hard**, because we are so hard-headed, so stiff-necked, and He has to use such force as to **cause** us, **make** us, to make the right choices.

The hard thing is to get us to be pliable and yielded to Him, and that takes years and years, because human nature is so powerful, and wants to resist Him on every front. The hard thing, brethren, is to save us from human nature, and to create His image in us. That is what takes the time. That is what takes the experiences.

To be saved from that requires all the power and efforts of the great Creator to do that. And is He pleased when He begins to see the good works and we begin to take form and shape into His image. So even if He has to hit us upside the head with a 2 x 4, He only does it as a last resort to get us to yield willingly to Him so that He can bless us with more of His Spirit, more of His powers.

Salvation is more accurately understood as the whole creative process, because we are delivered from more than merely death. Just like Israel, they were not put in their inheritance in the blink of an eye. They had to go through a whole forty-year process to prepare them for taking over the land.

There is another good reason for understanding this way that has nothing at all to do with grammar. It has **everything** to do with faith, which I will show you later in this series. We tend to think of *good works* as any act of good done at any time in our lives. But what God means by *good works* is not even possible until He begins His creative spiritual process, as Ephesians 2:8 clearly shows, and there is even another very good reason for this understanding.

Brethren, we have to begin to think about broadening our understanding of the term *salvation*, and narrowing our understanding of the term *good works*. The next time I speak I will be picking up this subject once again right in Ephesians 2:5-8. Then we will see what I am intending to show you, and we will begin to bring in other areas as well.