

God's Workmanship (Part 3)

God's Direction

John W. Ritenbaugh

Given 13-Sep-97; Tape #306

I think that we have seen that God says very clearly one time in Ezekiel 36: 27 that He will *cause* *cause* us to walk in His law, or His instruction, giving certainly the impression that He is going to be exercising His creative powers to make us, channel us into living a certain way of life.

We also saw in Proverbs 21: 1 where it very clearly says that *the king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, and He turns it wherever He wishes*. That particular verse has application to show us that God exercises His sovereignty over His creation in manipulating the political powers on earth to go in the direction that He wants them to go, that "the heart of the king is in the hand of the Lord, and He turns it wherever He wishes." Just as the picture that is in that particular verse is like a person irrigating his crops and he switches a gate in it to make the water flow in a direction that he wants it to go in order to irrigate a certain field that he wants it to go into. Well God does that with the heart of the king in order to bring about purposes of His plan.

So we see it applied individually and we see it applied to nations—God is actively directing His creation to the conclusion of the purpose that He has in mind, and those activities include *working on us*. We need to see this very clearly. He is actively involved in our lives. He is working on us. In Ephesians 2 He clearly says that we, His begotten children, are His workmanship, and that we are created for a specific purpose, and that is, *to bring forth good works*. What that verse gives us insight to is that it is His workmanship that is the direct cause of our doing good works. We are being created in His image for the purpose of living life as He does in order that we can join with Him in perfect harmony in completing His further plans beyond the second resurrection.

Ephesians 2: 8 also clearly shows that salvation occurred sometime in the indefinite past, and its effects are continuing at the time of Paul's writing. Therefore, whatever the Bible means by *salvatio* *salvation* it is in reality a precursor to good works. Good works are the product of our union with Christ, because He said that "without Me, you can do nothing," and until we are in union with Him, we can do nothing spiritually as it pertains to God's purpose in His Kingdom. Therefore, good works cannot be the cause of something—salvation—that occurred before they were ever brought forth by the Master Potter.

Now brethren, what we tend to understand by the terms *salvation* and *good works* is not exactly what God means. We have the tendency to think of salvation only as to what occurs at the end, that is, when we are resurrected and born again into the Kingdom of God. This indeed is partly true, but as we are seeing, the apostles wrote of salvation as something that happened in the indefinite past, before the good works were ever brought forth.

Turn with me to Psalm 74. This is a *wonderful* psalm in terms of what the church is going through right now. By *right now*, I mean the past ten years or so.

Psalm 74:12 For God is my King of old, working salvation in the midst of the earth.

"Working." What does that tell you? It tells you something that is in progress. If it was done, you would say *worked*, see. *He is working salvation in the midst of the earth*. You can connect this with John 5:17, where Jesus said in reply to an accusation that was made against Him, because the Jews were accusing Him of breaking the Sabbath, He said, "My Father works hitherto, and I work." This is not a good translation in the *King James*. The word *hitherto* has a tendency to throw us. But it says in a modern translation, "My Father is working, and I am working."—present tense.

What is God working? He is working salvation. That is what He is involved in. God is the Creator, and creation requires works in order to bring forth what is being created. And so He is working. It is a work in progress.

We don't want to lose track of Ephesians 2:8 which definitely showed that salvation occurred sometime in the indefinite past, and that we were saved in the indefinite past, and that salvation continued up to the time that the apostle Paul wrote what he did there in Ephesians 2:8.

In order for us to understand salvation more accurately we have to understand it as being the entire creative process, because we are saved from more than death. Think, if you will, of God saving, rescuing, and delivering Israel from their bondage in Egypt. What He did there was the major event that He uses to picture to us our deliverance from this world, from Satan the Devil, and from death. Now think about that. Deliverance from Satan, deliverance from the world, and deliverance from death. We are beginning to see a progression here, and that is the way it was with Israel.

Let me ask you something, and this ought to be easily answered. When Israel was taken out of Egypt, was God done with His work then? Not at all. But they were at that point *saved* from their immediate bondage. But what happened in the wilderness? They all died in the wilderness, except for two men, and presumably their families, Joshua and Caleb. Everybody else died. Do you know why? Because Egypt never left the Israelites. Everywhere they went, they carried the world with them. They were not saved from Egypt in that sense, and the reason is because at that time it was not in God's purpose to deliver them from that spiritual bondage. He did deliver them so that there would be a type from their physical bondage to Egypt, but the spiritual bondage remained within them because God did not work to save them from it. Instead He left a 40-year long record of what happens to a people who are geographically separated from their captivity, but never spiritually separated from it.

What God means by salvation then, in terms of His begotten children, includes the entire process—justification, sanctification, and glorification—because the process is not complete until glorification takes place, and then we can say *we are absolutely saved*.

Let us add to this what 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, because *good works* by God's definition, for His begotten children, cannot be done until He gives us His Spirit, and those works are then generated by and energized by His Spirit. Then those works are fit for the Kingdom of God.

So then, with the term *salvation*, our understanding of it has to be broadened, and with the term *good works*, it has to be narrowed in order to conform scripturally.

I am going to give us a quick grammar lesson in verses where the word *saved* appears in English as an already accomplished task, or fact. We have been kind of concentrating on Ephesians 2:8, but I am going to show you that Ephesians 2:8 does not stand alone.

Previously I have given you definitions. One was from *McClarens Commentary*. That was the first sermon. And then in the second sermon I gave you those definitions from English dictionaries so that we would see that the English, in terms of the perfect tense, agrees exactly with the Greek.

Now I am going to give you from *Zodhiates* the definition that he has listed for these words that are translated *saved*, in a variety of verses. The first one is Ephesians 2:5 and 8. Now listen to *Zodhiates*' definition of this grammatical tense. First of all, it is in the perfect tense, and he says:

It describes an action, or more correctly a process that took place in the past, the result of which have continued to the present. It has no exact equivalent in English, but is usually translated by using the auxiliary verb *shad*, or *have*.

I am going to give just one phrase that this appears in a different context. Jesus said, "Daughter, your faith has made you whole." "*Has made*"—in the past—"whole." The faith was a precursor to the act, and the faith occurred in the indefinite past, and as she stood before Christ she was now whole because of what happened in the past. It does not say how close it happened in time. It only happened in the past.

Let us turn to Luke 7:50 where again we see this phrase written in the perfect tense. It is a little bit different though. It is the perfect indicative.

And he said to the woman, Your faith has saved you; go in peace.

This is the woman, "a sinner" as she was called, who knelt down at Jesus' feet, anointed them with oil, and cried on them. Her tears dropped on His feet and she dried them with her hair. This one is in the perfect indicative tense. *Zodhiates* says, "It is in the indicative mood, [that is a special meaning], and temporal [time] significance of the perfect tense is at its height; however, the context of the Greek may emphasize either the completeness of the action or the finished result." In this particular verse, it is talking about the finished result. So it did happen. Her faith occurred in the indefinite past, but the emphasis is on the fact that she was now whole. What she had previously—faith—was the precursor to her being whole.

Turn to I Corinthians 15:1-2. This one is written in the present indicative.

"Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also you have received, and wherein you stand; by which [the gospel, the message] also ye are saved."

Present tense. They were not in their graves. They were still alive, and when Paul wrote this, these people he considered *saved* already. *Zodhiates* says, "The present indicative asserts something which is occurring while the speaker is making the statement." *Already saved*.

Now, just as far as we have gone, we already see indications of salvation being a process. It is written of in the perfect tense—something that occurred in the indefinite past. It is written in the present tense as something that is occurring right at this moment while the apostle is writing. This next scripture is kind of a beautiful one which I will not explain more of, but maybe use it in a sermon after this because it is beautiful.

I I Corinthians 2:14 Now thanks be unto God, which always causes us to triumph in Christ.

That is a key to what is going on. "Triumph in Christ!" We have already won!

I I Corinthians 2:14-15 And makes manifest the savor [the fragrance] of his knowledge by us in every place. For we are unto God a sweet savor [a sweet fragrance] of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish.

This is a little bit different from I Corinthians 2. It is written in the present passive, and *Zodhiates* says, "Expresses continuous or repeated action. Since in Greek, the time of the action is represented by participles is relative to the main verb, the present participle is used to signify action that is contemporaneous with the leading verb." The leading verb there is *are*. Right now. Those people were saved right now. I Corinthians 1:18 is written in the same way that I I Corinthians 2:15 is—in the present passive.

I I Timothy 1:8-9 Be not you therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner; but be you partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God; Who has saved us, and called us.

That is kind of interesting. When did your calling take place? It took place in the past. That word *saved* is in exactly the same tense as the word *called*, and you readily admit that you were called in the past. Well, Paul was saying that you were saved in the past too. This one is written in the *aorist* participle—active. *Zodhiates* says, "Expresses simple action as opposed to continuous action." It is a little bit different from the others, in which *saved* was put in an *occurring right at that moment* sense. Here it is not that way. It is just simple action. It does not in itself indicate the time of the action; however when its relationship to the main verb is temporal, such as time, it usually signifies action prior to that of the main verb. In this case it simply indicates the reality of what has occurred without reference to time. As you can see, Ephesians 2:5 and 8 do not stand alone.

Titus 3:5 Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us.

This is *aorist* indicative. *Zodhiates* says it expresses action that is not continuous. It does not specify the relative time of the action to the time of the speaking.

I am going to give you another verse because it is written in exactly the same text.

I John 2:27 But the anointing which you have received of him abides in you. . .

That anointing is the receipt of God's Holy Spirit. Did you not receive God's Holy Spirit at sometime in the past?

I John 2:27 . . . and you need not that any man teach you; but as the same anointing

teaches you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it has taught you, you shall abide in him.

So nobody here doubts that they received the Holy Spirit at sometime in the indefinite past, and that is exactly the tense that Titus 3:5 uses in reference to salvation.

We will look at one more. This is also in the *aorist* indicative.

Romans 8:24 For we are saved by hope.

That is very clear. Now brethren, there is nothing that I can do about those scriptures. The overwhelming majority of scriptures using the words *save* or *saved*, which pertain to the converted person, are written in either the past, present, or perfect tenses. To balance things off, I am going to give you a couple that are written in the future tense.

Romans 5:9 Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved [future tense] by his life.

I Corinthians 3:15 If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.

Again, in the future.

I Timothy 2:15 Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety.

There might be a couple more scriptures, but the Bible shows the possibility of the loss of salvation in a different way. So far to this point, I think that we have clearly seen that salvation—what God calls salvation for His begotten children—is a process. It has a past, it has a present, and it has a future, and it is not wrong for a person to say *that they are saved*. We will keep refining this as we go along.

It says that God shows the possibility of the loss of salvation in a different way. So let us go to the book of Jude, verses 4 through 8. Jude undoubtedly wrote this during a period of time when the church was under a great deal of stress. It may very well have been typical of what the church of God is going through right now. It is in progress. It is scattered all over the place, and there is a great deal of persecution coming on God's people, especially from within.

Jude 4 For there are certain men crept in [the church] unawares [stealthily], who were before of old ordained to this condemnation,

Not that they particularly were picked out by God to do this, but rather that God prophesied that it would occur. A generality.

Jude 4ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now listen to this from God's apostle.

Jude 5 I will therefore put you in remembrance, though you once knew this,

Kind of giving the indication that maybe they had forgotten a thing or two.

Jude 5 . . . how that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed them

Did they lose their salvation, as it were? Physically, yes. Now look at what caused the loss.

Jude 5them that believed not.

Hang onto that, because that is going to be the item that determines salvation – grace and faith. And then another reminder:

Jude 6 And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day.

Did they lose out on what could have been? Yes. Is not the message here very clear that it is possible for a person who has salvation to lose it—something that he had in the past is possible that it will slip from the person's grasp because he did not have faith?

Jude 7 Even as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example [for you and me of this very thing], suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.

Those cities will never be rebuilt. They will always be a reminder to those of faith of the possibility of losing what had been so graciously and generously given to them, whether it be Israelite, whether it be angel, or whether it be Gentile. Do you see what I mean? God shows in different ways that it is possible for a person who has something, to lose it. It is possible for a person who was saved by God to lose that salvation.

I am not preaching *once saved, always saved*, but I am preaching you the truth of what God says about these scriptures. Those scriptures are written in the perfect tense, in the present tense, and in the future tense, *that we have salvation in our grasp right now*. You have it, if, as we will see, things continue as they are.

For the Israelites who left Egypt, could they have completed the course? Yes, they could have, but they did not. Do you think it is any wonder that Jesus said *that he that endures to the end shall be saved*? That is sobering. Well, God is very gracious, but He takes into account the value of what He has given to us and places the responsibility on our shoulders, to yield to Him, and He carries us, as we are going to see, as we go along.

Did you ever stop to think of how many people died in the wilderness to make a sobering witness to you and me of the value of what we had given to us? God is so expansive in His generosity to His children that He made a witness of the death of well over a million people to sober us up.

Deuteronomy 2:14-15 And the space in which we came from Kadesh-barnea, until we were come over the brook Zered, was thirty and eight years; until all the generation of the men of war were wasted out from among the host, as the LORD swore unto them. For indeed the hand of the LORD was against them, to destroy them from among the host, until they were consumed.

What made God so angry? Their lack of faith. He said *Go up and take over the land at the end of the second year*, and they refused to go up. They refused to heed the admonitions of Joshua

and Caleb *that it was a good land. Yes, the people are good, but the Lord is with us. He can destroy them. What do we have to fear?* But their lack of faith held them back. Well it says in Numbers 1: 46 that there were 603,550 men that were counted age 20 and above. Now if you add to that an equal number of women, divide by the number of days in 38 years, you will come to the figure of 87 graves per day that they had to dig. If you divide by the number of days in 40 years, it still comes out to 85 per day. Eighty-five people a day were buried in their graves because they lost their grip on the salvation that God had given them. That witness was made by God ~~for~~ you; for us to realize that we must be sober about our responsibility, because we have received something far more precious than they ever even dreamed of.

Let us go back to II Peter 2: 20 as I continue to show you that the apostles wrote of the possibility of losing the wonderful thing—the salvation that we have been given—and it is already in our grasp.

II Peter 2: 20-22 For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them [Notice, in the past tense.] But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, "The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire" [quoting the proverb].

That in turn is another very plain and clear warning to you and me about people who had knowledge of their Lord and Savior, came out of the world, because they escaped the pollution of the world. Then they turned back to it again because they found it attractive, and now Peter said they would have been better off never to even have known it. You look at the entire context, and the people that he is talking about were the false teachers who were within the church, and denying the Lord that bought them.

One of the keys to understanding the book of Hebrews is to have knowledge that it was written to a group of people who were backsliding, people who were slipping, drifting away.

Hebrews 2:1 Therefore we [meaning Christians] ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip.

That is pretty clear, but that is directed to those to whom Paul is writing, and that was a group of Hebrew Christians. As a result, the book contains a series of warnings. As a matter of fact there are five very strong, I would say arguably the strongest warnings in the entire Bible about falling away. We are going to look at some of these very quickly. Let us go to chapter 10, and verses 26-31. This gets my vote as the strongest warning in the entire Bible. Whoever wrote this was romping and stomping at this time.

Hebrews 10:26 For if we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth . . .

It is truth that sets free. It is truth that gives salvation.

Hebrews 10:26 If we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the

truth [Here come the most sobering words in the entire Bible] there remains no more sacrifice for sins.

We cannot be forgiven. When somebody has reached that point, they have blasphemed the Holy Spirit, and God will not forgive. They have lost it. Now I want you to understand that the apostle Paul, or whoever wrote this book, did not feel, it was his judgment, that these people had not lost it yet, but they were slipping away. They were being carried away by the tide of influence that was coming from the world. But that is why he wrote the book. He could see them slipping away. The tide was taking them out, and they were sitting in the boat practically, I guess, doing nothing except watching it drift away from the shore.

Hebrews 10:27-31 But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, [What does that remind you of? That is the Lake of Fire.] which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: Of how much sorer punishment, suppose you, shall he be thought worthy, who has trodden under foot the Son of God, and has counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and has done despite unto the Spirit of grace? For we know him that has said, Vengeance belongs unto me, I will recompense, says the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

How much plainer can it get, that we can lose it? We can lose what we now possess—salvation. That is not *once saved, always saved*. The *once saved, always saved* doctrine said there are no conditions once you come under the blood of Jesus Christ. And so this is the end for those who have apostatized, those whose lives are characterized by keeping on sinning. Christ's sacrifice does not cover people who keep on sinning. It covers those who repent. I am going to twist it a little bit. It covers those who are yielding to His workmanship. Do you know what they are doing because they are yielding? By God's Spirit, they are producing good works.

Let us go back to Hebrews 6:1, 4-6. Every one of us ought to understand this. Verse 1 will set the stage.

Hebrews 6:1, 4-6 Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God. . . . For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.

This is a precursor of what Paul said in Hebrews 10, saying virtually the same thing. So, *if they fall away* means, *if they fall away from Christianity by leaving it*. You might remember when I was earlier expounding Ephesians 2:8, that when it is written in the perfect tense it is assuming that if their lives continue as they were, the peoples' salvation was secure. What these verses in Hebrews emphasize is the impossibility of making a second beginning. It is one calling to a person. Therefore, slipping back is dangerous indeed.

I mentioned earlier that Paul did not consider these people, even though they had slipped

considerably, had fallen away. He therefore did not consider that forgiveness was impossible. Therefore, revival from a state of slipping is possible, but it also indicates that our initial repentance and forgiveness is a unique, never to occur again event, as far as we are concerned. One to a customer. It's too precious to let it just flutter away through inactivity, through unbelief. In Hebrews 3:12 is another one of those warnings.

Hebrews 3:12 Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief,

Paul says that is evil. That is what the Israelites lost out on. They did not believe God. Paul said it is evil.

Hebrews 3:12-13-14in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. [Now listen to this verse.] For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end.

There is a condition for salvation. Not *once saved, always saved*, even though those verses are written the way they are. A little bit later on we'll go through why they're written the way they are. It's for your benefit that they're written the way they are. That word *it* certainly indicates the possibility of falling away.

Hebrews 4:1-2 Let us therefore fear [Let us be extremely careful.] lest a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.

So do not be complacent. There is real danger that the promise to enter into His Kingdom still stands. The parallel to what Paul wrote here—the parallel to you and me—is that just being *in the church*, the equivalent there was the Israelites who were *in the wilderness*. They were *in the congregation in the wilderness*. So the parallel to you and me is that just being *in the church* does not mean the promise of being *in His rest* is fulfilled. *Rest* means more than being in the church. Being in the church is just the beginning—a very, very important part of our lives. So the *rest* that he is speaking of here still lies ahead of us in the Kingdom of God. What we have here in the church is just a tiny foreshadow of what is yet to come.

I am going to show you an awesome scripture back in the book of Isaiah. To me, it is awesome in terms of being pregnant with encouragement.

Isaiah 46:1-5 Bel bows down, Nebo stoops. [They were the major gods of Babylon.] Their idols were upon the beasts, and upon the cattle; your carriages were heavy laden; they are a burden to the weary beast. They stoop, they bow down together; they could not deliver the burden, but themselves are gone into captivity. [Now listen to this contrast.] Harken unto me, O house of Jacob, and all the remnant of the house of Israel, which are borne [meaning carried] by me from the belly, which are carried from the womb: [By whom? God.] And even to your old age I am he; and even to hoar hairs [when our hair becomes gray] I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you. To whom will you liken me?

Do you know what He is saying there? He is pointing the finger at us and says "You name me one god who can do what I'm going to do, and am doing right at this moment. I will never fail you," He says. Do you see what this says? We have no excuse for not remaining faithful. The burden of salvation is on Him. Did He not say that He carried Israel on eagle's wings? What an awesome promise. *I will bear you.*

One of the major flaws in this world's Christianity revolves around the concept of works. They keep misapplying it as solely an attempt to get salvation, when works are not encouraged by God for that purpose at all. God encourages works, but He does not encourage them