

Ephesians: Sit. Walk. Stand.

26 – THE TRUTH ABOUT GOOD WORKS

Let's digress briefly for the sake of context. Everything in Scripture requires context. Without context, one can twist Scripture to make it say anything you want. So let's take a moment to review where we've been, so we'll understand where we're going. **Ephesians 2:8-9** (KJV) Please say these two verses aloud with me. Ready? ⁸ *For by grace are you saved through faith—and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God—* ⁹ *not by works, lest any man should boast.*

So what have we learned from these two verses?

- **Salvation requires faith—faith enabled by the Holy Spirit.**
- **Salvation is not *because* of us; salvation is *in spite* of us.**
- **Salvation is a gift; we either receive salvation as a gift—or not at all.**
- **Our good works cannot save us—they are as “filthy rags.”**
- **Grace glorifies God. Works glorify man.**
- **Heaven-bound believers find no room for boasting in themselves.**

Truth be told...*all of us need God's grace!* This brings us to **Ephesians 2:10** (NIV) *For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works...*

We are born in sin, we have a nature of sin, and given the choice—we choose sin. Because we are sinners through and through, we desperately *need* God's grace! We are saved *by grace* through faith in Christ alone! So what about good works? Aren't Christians supposed to do good works? Let's find out. Here is...
the truth about good works.

1. Good works start with god. (Vs. 10a)

For we are God's workmanship...

“God's workmanship” defines what it means to be a follower of Christ. That believers are *God's* workmanship is significant. God is the doer. *He* performs the work. We do not make ourselves Christians. We are not what we *are* as a result of anything that *we* have done. *We* contribute nothing of merit to our salvation. Our role is solely to receive. That's because salvation is *devised* by God alone. Michelangelo assumed responsibility for his sculptures from start to finish. He went to the quarry *himself* to select the marble on which he would work... Once it arrived at his studio, he would allow no other hand to touch the stone, lest it be marred.

God deals with sinners in a similar fashion. Everything within us which *pleases* God is of God. *We are* the supernatural handiwork of God. He goes to the quarry of rock-hardened hearts; He marks out a dead stone; He quarries it; He breathes life into it; and He begins to fashion it.

We, the blocks of stone, want to do *something* to help God. We *yearn* to merit our own salvation, and oh, how we want to remake ourselves to fit our *own* desires! But each time we begin to exert ourselves, God says, “Stop it! Seriously. Stop it! Be *still* and know that I am God.” The Lord wants both salvation and sanctification done right, and thus, He does it all Himself.

The term *Workmanship* is a word from the field of art. “*Poiema*,” is based on a verb meaning, “*to do or to make*.” It denotes something which is made. *Workmanship* refers to “*God’s artwork; God’s masterpiece*.” This word pictures God as an Artist laboring in a workshop—fashioning, forming, bringing into being. You, my believing friend, are a by-product of God’s artistic genius.

Workmanship is a beautiful thing. When you make something good, you take pride in your workmanship. Man became the crowning work of God’s creation.

Taken from the realm of art, the word “*poiema*” denotes something orderly and beautiful—something which is being fashioned toward perfection.

Some years ago, the original motto of a particular manufacturer was as follows: “*The relentless pursuit of perfection*.” Does anyone remember who coined this marketing slogan? **Lexus**—creators of luxury cars. God is the Creator of luxury people. Believers are God’s *workmanship*, through which He seeks to manifest order, and beauty, and perfection. He crafts us in His studio, displays us in the gallery of Earth, and prepares us for the gallery of Heaven.

From “*poiema*” we derive the English word “*poem*,” our title for the masterpiece of literary workmanship. Believers are to be God’s living words on this Earth—we are to be His poetry—to describe and reflect His glory. Our lives must *not* detract from God’s workmanship. I have enlisted two people to help illustrate the difference between *God’s* workmanship and *our* workmanship using the vehicle of poetry: Here to help with this illustration: Carolyn Westbrook and Mark Cloyd. Credentials: Carolyn served for 25 years as an English teacher, while Mark says that he is still trying learning the English language!

The poet lyrically says, “*O Romeo, Romeo! Wherefore art thou Romeo?*” But a layman distorts it by blurting out, “*Hey! Romeo! Where ere ya, dude?*”

The poet gently remarks, *“What light through yonder window breaks?”*
But an uncouth tongue says, *“I wonder who turned on the dad-gum light?”*

Hamlet’s *“To be, or not to be: That is the question”* is certainly more powerful than *“Well, shall I kill that rascal, or not?”*

The poet caresses our hearts with, *“What’s in a name? That which we call a rose, by any other name would smell as sweet.”* But we feel almost violated by...
“Whatever you call that thingie, its pollen makes me sneeze!”

So what’s the point? **Just as an uncouth tongue detracts from poetry, so we detract from God’s workmanship when we try to do God’s job for Him. Cease trying to improve on God’s plan! Salvation is God’s work! Salvation is something that *only God can do!*** the truth about good works. . .

2. Good works are created “in Christ Jesus.” (vs. 10B)

...created in Christ Jesus. . .

Only God can save, for it requires creation—the making of something out of nothing. Salvation is not merely the doctoring up of our sinful nature. Our sinful nature does *not* reform. Salvation is a creation. Where there is nothing, God *creates* a new nature. Salvation requires a power which wills new life into existence. Only the Lord God possesses such power.

People whose lives are marred and ruined by sin can be “*created*” anew—*“in Christ Jesus.”* Only our Savior, Christ Jesus, can save. Only *through* Christ can a man have a radical change in his life in but a single moment. **Wretched sinners can be altered in an instant.** But here’s what’s interesting: **Our pride bows up against this truth.** This goes *against* the grain of our culture. **Supposedly...**

- “You can’t teach an old dog new tricks.”
- “You can’t change a leopard’s spots.”

New birth in Christ throws these clichés to the wind. *“Created in Christ Jesus,”* a man *can be* radically changed! **Even for one who is as vile as Lucifer, one can be made clean and pure “in Christ Jesus.”** No sin is too huge, and no stack of sins are too many to cripple the saving power of God.

“We are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus...”—for what reason?

3. Good works are why we were created. (vs. 10c)

[Created in Christ Jesus]. . . *for good works*. . .

Let's talk about the word "*for*"—F-O-R—for just a moment. This preposition directs our thoughts toward the *purpose* of the new creation. A Creator who wills new life into existence has every right to exert absolute sovereignty over His creation. God has the right to determine whatever purpose He chooses for everything He creates. God has this right, and He exercises it. He assigned a specific purpose for each part of His original creation. Sun, moon, stars, planets, vegetation, and animals all function in ways ordained by God. God also has a purpose for each of His creations of new spiritual life. **Every believer has a divinely specified mission: We are created "*for*" good works.**

After much hesitation, Paul finally feels comfortable enough to discuss the role of good works in a believer's life. He has been very careful to keep works in their proper place. In vs. 7 through the first part of vs. 10, Paul has just delivered a divine discourse exalting salvation by grace. **Paul has mentioned 10 things about salvation by grace through faith in Christ alone...**

- In salvation, God displays the "incomparable riches" of His grace.
- In salvation, God expresses "His kindness to us in Christ Jesus."
- Salvation is "by grace."
- Salvation is "through faith."
- Salvation is "not of yourselves."
- Salvation is "the gift of God."
- Salvation is "not by works."
- In salvation, "no one can boast."
- In salvation, we are "God's workmanship."
- In salvation, we are "created in Christ Jesus."

With a ten-fold assault, Paul has hammered the doctrine of salvation by works. The term "*for*" is Paul's eleventh blow against this false doctrine. **We are saved "*for*" good works, not "*by*" good works.**

This is a prime example of how *every single word* of Scripture is important. Change even the seemingly *least* significant of words, and the entire meaning can change! Observe... "**Created in Christ FOR good works.**" OR... "**Created in Christ BY good works.**" How different would our theology be if we changed just this one word?

Good works are the fruit, not the root, of salvation. They are effect, not cause. Good works are a *result*—a *consequence*—of salvation already accomplished. Yet many people still try to use good works to merit Heaven! No, no, NO! *Believers* are already seated in the Heavenly realms! We do not do good works to *earn* salvation! So why *do* good works? Here's why: **Out of gratitude to the God who changed our hearts and forgave our sins—we *want* to do good works!**

After eleven jack-hammer blows for grace, the Apostle Paul, God's champion of grace, now speaks favorably of good works. Paul forcefully opposed works as merit for salvation, but he *avored* good works as an *evidence of* salvation.

It is acceptable to object to a thing in the *wrong* place, and to accept the same thing in the *right* place. Fire is fine in my fireplace, but it's bad in my couch. Works have nothing to do with earning salvation, but they are *crucial* in their proper place. Works cannot save us, but something is terribly, terribly wrong with anyone who claims to be Christian—but who does *not* live a life which results in good works. **Good works are the necessary, normal outcome of faith in Jesus Christ.**

James 2:26 (NASB) reminds us, "*Faith without works is dead.*" Do not delude yourself. Do not be deceived. The proof of faith is good works. We Baptists trumpet the belief that **Justification by grace through faith leads to glorification — without fail.** But we sometimes seem slow to champion the parallel truth that **Justification by grace through faith also leads to sanctification—without fail.** Good works are inseparably tied to salvation as a byproduct of salvation.

Titus 2:14 (CSB) says, *He gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to cleanse for himself a people for his own possession, eager to do good works.* What?! A people eager to do what? A people eager to do good works!

I thank God for giving us a way whereby we can better analyze whether or not we are saved. As a pastor, I often find it difficult to know with confidence who is—and who is not saved. I've often wished that God would've built special light bulbs into the tops of our heads. Then when someone is saved, the light bulb would immediately begin to flash! "*Lookie there! That one is saved!*" But God chose not to use light bulbs as identifying marks. Instead, **He chose to give us *this* acid test of salvation: A hunger and passion to do good works.** So what do these "*good works*" look like? Here are several examples in the form of questions, although this list is far from all-inclusive...

- **Do you have a hunger for holiness?**

- **Do you yearn to be more like Christ?**
- **Do you have a passion for His Word and for prayer?**
- **Do you hate sin—especially in yourself?**
- **Do you have a passion to serve and glorify Christ?**

All of these things are indicators of a life changed by Christ. And *if* God-induced, all of these things are examples of “*good works*” which God created you to do.

Of course, **There are objections to the concept of salvation by grace—not by works.** “*Saved by grace and not by works? Won’t people abuse this?*” Anyone who uses the doctrine of salvation by grace—OR the doctrine of eternal security as an excuse to sin *has never been saved* by grace. A clear mark of a grace-saved person is an absolute passion for—and devotion to—Jesus Christ.

When someone much greater than ourselves loves us and bestows favor upon us, we *know* that we don’t deserve it! Their love is an unmerited gift! Nevertheless, we deeply desire to spend the rest of our lives at least *trying* to be worthy of that love. All of life becomes an intense passion to express gratitude to the One who loves us with such unmerited favor.

When we grasp the doctrine of salvation by grace, we are awed by God’s forgiveness, and we find ourselves *compelled* to love Him back and to serve Him. A love which saves undeserving wretches like us constrains our hearts to be knit together forever with Him. This is expressed well in a song we sang earlier:

**Living for Jesus who died in my place,
bearing on Calv’ry my sin and disgrace.
Such love constrains me to answer His call,
follow His leading, and give Him my all.**

Are you truly giving Him your all? What do the works of your life say? As a response to the God who saved us by grace, and who calls us to do good works, let’s passionately sing this song again. As we sing, this will be your opportunity to respond to whatever God is speaking to your heart this morning. Maybe God is calling you to salvation by grace—not by good works. As we sing, I invite you to meet me at the front so we can help you get started with Jesus. Or maybe God is calling you, believer, to a more surrendered life out of gratitude for all that Christ has done for you. As we sing, I also invite *you* to meet me at the front. It would be my honor to pray *with* you and *for* you.