

BEING A MASTERPIECE

Saturday, April 13

Reading: Ephesians 2:8-13

Ephesians 2:8 *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—*
9 *not by works, so that no one can boast. 10* *For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which*
God prepared in advance for us to do.

Ephesians 2:8-9 are among the most important verses in the New Testament. They fly in the face of every other religion. These religions teach that you must earn your way to salvation through good deeds. But Paul tells us in these verses that salvation is not by works. It is the free gift of God's grace. Even the faith to accept forgiveness is a gift of God! There is absolutely nothing we can do to earn salvation.

Having established that we are not saved BY good works, Paul reminds us that we were saved FOR good works. God created us to serve Him and has prepared good works for each of us to do. Christians who do not serve the Lord with their lives are failing to do what God created them to do.

Paul now turns to the Gentile Christians. Gentiles were shunned by “good Jews.” Israel was God's chosen people and Gentiles had no rights, no part in the promises of God, and no hope. But through God's grace they received the gospel of Jesus Christ and now have been brought to God. More on this tomorrow.

LESSON ONE: “Not From Yourselves.” When I teach children, I often hold out a dollar bill and ask them what they think they have to do to get the dollar. I get all kinds of answers from “be good” to “go to church and read my Bible.” It usually takes some prodding to get the right answer. All they have to do is come up and take it! The world doesn't think in terms of a “free gift.” They believe you must DO something to earn it! The problem with a works-based salvation is that you never know if you have done enough! Followers of every other religion can only hope that they have done enough to earn their way. We who have faith in Christ have the wonderful assurance that God has done it all. We don't – we can't – earn salvation. It is God's free gift! Have you been trying to earn favor with God by doing good works? Thank the Lord today that He has already provided everything we need for salvation. All we have to do is by faith take it!

LESSON TWO: “We are God's Handiwork.” The Greek word the Apostle Paul uses here is *poiēma* which comes from a word meaning ‘to create.’ It was used of an artist creating a masterpiece or a poet writing a poem. We are God's masterpiece created to do good works. Some Christians like to say, “I'm not saved by what I do, so it's OK if I don't do anything after I'm saved.” Ephesians 2:10 says just the opposite. Reformer John Calvin once said, “It is faith alone that justifies; but faith that justifies can never be alone.” The presence of good works in our lives is the proof that we are truly saved. God has specially prepared these works for us to do. He has “appointments” for us if we are open to His leading and obedient to His call. How many times do we miss opportunities God has placed before us simply because we are not looking for them? Keep your eyes open for God's appointments to do good today.