

Ephesians 2:10 "Saved Unto Good Works, Not By Good Works"

Two of the most well-known verses in the Bible give us the basis for our salvation. These two verses are responsible for giving us a proper understanding of our relationship with God through Christ. We find them in the letter before us this morning.

EPH 2:8-9 "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - 9 not by works, so that no one can boast."

The world has long contended that one can work their way to heaven. Most religious organizations would agree. One of the largest such organizations is the Roman Catholic Church, of which I was a part for the first 20 years of my life, and which boasts of some one billion people in its association.

Many "evangelicals" have begun to align themselves in working together with this group so as to bring unity between both parties. And yet Eph.2:8-9 clearly tells us that you can't work your way to heaven, which is precisely part of the salvation package Rome proclaims.

They have always believed this. In fact, Pope Eugene IV, in the document entitled *Cantate Domino* in 1441, said, "only those remaining within this unity [this Roman Catholic Church] can profit by the sacraments of the Church unto salvation, and they alone can receive eternal recompense for their fasts, their almsgivings, their other works of Christian piety and the duties of a Christian soldier..."

They also contend that unless you are part of the Roman Catholic Church you cannot be saved from the penalty of your sins. They refer to this in the Latin as "*Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus*". Pope Innocent III at the fourth Lateran Council in 1215 stated, and the Church holds to this today, "There is but one universal Church of the faithful, outside of which no one at all is saved."

And yet Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, clearly says, "For it is by grace you have saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not as a result of works, that no one should boast."

Now the reason I bring this up is because in the days ahead you are going to hear from certain "Evangelicals" to be more tolerant of

Rome and not to be so rigid in our stance on differences we may have with each other.

The problem with this is that if we are talking about a different gospel from Rome, and we are, then we need to be willing to give the truth in love to these people, not to adopt them as "one of us", when it comes to being born again.

Does this mean that a Roman Catholic can't be born-again? Of course not. But by definition, if they became born-again, they would necessarily not fit the definition of what a Roman Catholic is.

In fact, according to Vatican I and II, anyone who believes that one can be saved by grace through faith alone in Jesus Christ he is considered anathema, which is to be eternally damned. So, for a Roman Catholic to continue to boast of his salvation by grace through faith alone in Christ, would be in direct opposition to his own church.

Again, I say this simply to warn you that there are "Evangelicals" who want to down-play the differences so as to bring an ecumenical unity which is no unity at all, because where unity is, truth also walks hand in hand.

We need to be discerning. True biblical discernment comes only from the living word of God. We need to have our eyes open in these last days. But we must not approach life with the "we against them" attitude. Roman Catholicism is a false Gospel, but the individual Roman Catholic is a person who needs to be loved with the truth and encouraged to turn to Christ alone by faith alone to receive salvation.

The same can be said of any other group in the world who approaches reconciliation with God through any works oriented approach. Every religion in the world, outside of true Biblical Christianity, is utilizing some form of working their way to heaven.

We need to be loving people with the truth of Christ's gospel, not overlooking blatant error, because it has eternal consequences. I love the Roman Catholics, as I love the Mormons and the Buddhists and any other person who is lost in sin. But not to give them the truth is no love at all. And not to recognize that they all preach death through a "works salvation" is to be naive.

We have been given the greatest news this world could ever know. It is the news that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, has come to die on the cross for the penalty of our sins, who then rose from the dead to give us His life and eternal fellowship. But that relationship can only happen as we repent of our sin and let go of our attempts to earn such a relationship, and embrace Christ alone for salvation.

Now I will say this about the Roman Catholic Church; they promote the importance of good works in this life; albeit a misplaced understanding. But, unfortunately many evangelicals don't understand the legitimate need for good works. Because of this free gift we receive by faith in Christ, there is a tendency to think that good works don't play a part in our salvation experience.

This couldn't be further from the truth. And this is why Paul continues in our text

EPH 2:10 "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

First of all, notice how verse 10 begins. We, that is true believers in Christ, are God's workmanship. Most of us have heard the expression, "that's a work of art". Imagine being a work of the living God. That's what you and I are in Christ.

This is not to suggest that the work mentioned here has to do with us becoming some sort of special icon to be displayed in a museum for everyone to "ooh" and "aah" over.

Unfortunately, this is the way Christianity is sometimes approached or viewed by others. We are not to place ourselves above others or to think that we were so special that God simply had to make us a part of His museum.

We are His workmanship in the sense that He took a piece of clay, which would have been burned, and He gave that clay life and is now molding us and shaping us into His image so that He might use us to shine for Him to bring glory to Him alone.

The imagery here shows us that God is personally involved in working in us for His good pleasure. This imagery is similar to what we read in GEN 2:7 "the LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being."

The breath of life came from God, both physically and spiritually. And it is the breath of life from God, if you will, which gives us life. Remember what Paul said in the beginning of this chapter:

EPH 2:1-2 "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, 2 in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient."

But then Paul goes on to say in EPH 2:4-5 "But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5 made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions - it is by grace you have been saved."

This is the workmanship for which only God can take credit and for which He must be worshiped. But that special workmanship is working in the lives of people like you and me who were dead and now we are alive because of His life giving work in us.

But simply being alive is not what we were called to. When we are born into this world as new born babies full of life, we are expected to grow and mature and be a part of the family into which we've been born. No one in the family expects that child to simply show signs of life, by breathing and having a pulse.

We were brought into this life to be a vibrant growing and functioning member of the family and to show that life in the way we develop. In the spiritual family, to which we belong by faith in Christ, it's no different.

Paul continues in verse 10 ... that we were "created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

There is a sense in which a special creation is going on in our lives in the same sense that a special creation took place in Adam and Eve. In other words, it was God who did the work, not us. It was God who brought life, not us. It was God who provided the only way to Himself in Christ.

But the reason He did this special work in us was for a purpose. And I think it's at this point where many Christians lose sight of the specialness of their salvation. It was always God's intention to use this life He's given us in Christ. It's not as though He wants us to take this gift and then sit and not grow in holiness or serve as His ambassadors.

He has work for us to do. But it's a special work which is heavenly in nature, because it comes from the throne of God Himself. This is where true Biblical evangelicals would part from Rome which believes that good works contribute to making your salvation possible.

We believe that good works are an essential aspect to one's salvation. But we believe that we are not saved by a combination of faith and good works. We believe we are saved unto good works after we've trusted Christ alone for our salvation.

The good works unto Christ demonstrate that one has life in Him, and that we are desirous to practice that new life to His honor and glory in the power of the Holy Spirit.

This is what Paul conveys when he wrote to Titus in Tit.2:14 "Christ Jesus gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds."

You'll notice the contrast here when Paul says, we were redeemed from every "lawless deed" to be zealous for "good deeds" unto Christ.

In our time remaining this morning I would like to address two things: 1) What is a good work or deed? and 2) how are we to be zealous in these works?

I think it's quite clear that we have been created in Christ Jesus "for" good works. And, as Paul tells us also, these good works have been prepared in advance by God for us to do. In other words, we can't opt out of them. We have an obligation to seek Him and walk in His ways according to His will, and fulfill His will as we do those things He desires of us.

Jesus makes it very clear that simply having life and light is not an end in itself.

MAT 5:16 "In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."

Though our Lord may have prepared in advance for us to do good deeds, He doesn't do them for us. They are considered "our" good deeds, realizing of course that we can only do any good deed because they are deeds done for Him and through Him.

But what is a good deed? Don't even unbelievers do good deeds? We would have to agree that even unbelievers do many good deeds in this world. They help one another in a variety of ways. Who would deny that helping to feed poor children in third world countries is a good deed? Who would deny that providing education to those unable to pay for college is not a good deed?

Is there really any distinction between a Christian doing a good deed and a pagan doing a good deed? Well, the word of God would say yes, there is a distinction. And part of the distinction has to do with the motive and what one expects to accomplish from that good deed, and most importantly, the source from which that good deed comes.

As good as good deeds are, they can be very deceiving in a way. Solomon writes in PRO 11:18 "The wicked man earns deceptive wages, but he who sows righteousness reaps a sure reward."

There is a sense in which people will try to use good deeds to gain attention for themselves or earn God's favor, but this will bring only death. So, what is a good deed according to God's word? Well, quite honestly they are not that much different from what the world may consider good deeds.

Jesus gives us some insight as to what would constitute a good deed.

MAT 25:34-40 "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. 35 For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, 36 I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' 37 "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? 38 When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? 39 When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' 40 "The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'

Much of what Jesus talks about here would be considered a normal good work anyone could do. But Jesus makes a distinction by saying you have done these things for Me. And implied in that statement is that we have done these things by faith and have done

these things out of thanks and gratitude, not to earn God's favor, but in loving response to His goodness and grace found in Christ.

Good works of this nature can be seen in every area of the Body of Christ as we read of godly widows in Paul's letter to Timothy.

1TI 5:10,25 "[she] is well known for her good deeds, such as bringing up children, showing hospitality, washing the feet of the saints, helping those in trouble and devoting herself to all kinds of good deeds." 25 ... good deeds are obvious, and even those that are not cannot be hidden."

These type of good works honor God, because they're done precisely because of the relationship we have with God by faith alone in Christ, but to try and take a good work and earn something from God is to disavow the only good work that accomplished our salvation, which is the work of Christ on the cross for the penalty of our sin, and His resurrection, which reconciles us back to the Father.

There are others in Scripture who would appear to have done good deeds and we see what these deeds earned them. Jesus again, makes the distinction of doing good deeds, outside of a relationship to Him, and good deeds as we obey the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ by faith alone.

MAT 7:21-23 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. 22 Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' 23 Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'"

To do good deeds and bring them as a sacrifice to God on the altar of our own righteousness is to reject and abhor the only way one can be considered righteous, and that's through the shed blood of Christ.

This is the reason Jesus tells them, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!' He's not rebuking them for doing a "good work", He's rebuking them for doing a good work as a means for their salvation while they reject the Son of God.

Any good work, outside of a relationship with Christ, is only good in this world, it has no redeeming quality, which is why the prophet Isaiah, in speaking to rebellious Israel could say, "All of us

have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away." (ISA 64:6)

Even for a Christian to do "good" works for selfish reasons or in a way which would bring attention to oneself could not be considered the kind of work that would honor Christ.

Acts 4:36 - 5:5 ³⁶ Now Joseph, a Levite of ^aCyprian birth, who was also called ^bBarnabas by the apostles (which translated means Son of ^{1c}Encouragement), ³⁷ and who owned a tract of land, sold it and brought the money and ^alaid it at the apostles' feet. ^{NAU} **Acts 5:1** But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, ² and ^akept back *some* of the price for himself, with his wife's ¹full knowledge, and bringing a portion of it, he ^blaid it at the apostles' feet. ³ But Peter said, "Ananias, why has ^aSatan filled your heart to lie ^bto the Holy Spirit and to ^ckeep back *some* of the price of the land? ⁴ "While it remained *unsold*, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not ¹under your control? Why is it that you have ²conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but ^ato God." ⁵ And as he heard these words, Ananias ^afell down and breathed his last; and ^bgreat fear came over all who heard of it.

In the case of Ananias and Sapphira Peter points out that they were well within their rights to hold on to any portion of the price of the land for themselves, but they set themselves up as imitating what Joseph, the Levite, had done in stating that he would give the full amount and then delivering the full amount.

Ananias essentially was doing a good work for the sake of the gospel, but had lied about the amount he was going to donate, as he on the one hand, gave the impression he would give the full amount of the selling price, but when it came time he held back some for himself.

Now this was certainly an extreme instance of how the Lord would make an example of a person within the body of Christ lying about a good work for the Lord and the Lord calling him and his wife out to demonstrate that God takes seriously our attitude in doing a good work for Him.

Our good deeds in Christ and for Christ are those good deeds which have eternal value. To do anything by faith as we're led by Him and used by Him for His glory, will be deemed a good work,

whether it's feeding the poor, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and imprisoned, or using our spiritual gifts in the Body of Christ.

These types of works, in Christ, are not only useful in this world but will be recognized by our Lord for eternity. This is what Paul says to Timothy.

1TI 6:18-19 "Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. 19 In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life."

The word "command" there in 1Timothy can also be translated "instruct". But the idea is the same in that we are to be instructed to do these things as though God Himself were the One giving the instructions, because He is. This is His word.

Good works involve everyday life as we live it for Him, but it also involves the building up of each other as we use our gifts in the Body of Christ. Paul talks about using the gifts of the Holy Spirit in this letter in chapter 4. Those gifts might be considered the high profile gifts of the Church, such as apostle, prophet, evangelist along with Pastors and teachers, as they are used to equip the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the Body of Christ.

But, it cannot be denied that each one of us have spiritual gifts given to us by the Holy Spirit for the express purpose of building each other up and extending the love and grace of God to the world as well. But good works would certainly include using our gifts as it pertains to this body.

This is why it's so important for each person here to consider how God may use your gift in this body for the edification of the church as well as being used by God as a way to further the Kingdom of God as we reach the lost and disciple believers here as we encourage each other to love and good deeds.

Every person here is vital to that end. No one person should be expected to do it all. We're all members of one another and each plays a vital role. Now, I know that it can be very scary to stretch by faith and use your gifts but remember, it's the Holy Spirit who enables and empowers us to do works of service. He's simply looking for someone who's willing as He puts the desire there.

And if any training needs to be done that is always available as others in this body can come alongside to help with their gifts to

help you do what God desires from you. We're in this together and we're to be lifting each other up in prayer as well as being there to come along side.

It's the grace of God working in our lives that true good works of faith can accomplish great things for the Lord. Listen to these promises and exhortations from God's word.

2CO 9:8 "And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work."

It's Christ Himself who has called us to good works and it is He who enables us to accomplish all things for His glory.

2TH 2:16-17 "May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, 17 encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word."

We have been saved unto good works; the kind of good works which spring from new life and gratitude for that free gift so that we can't contain ourselves, but thank our God with lives of obedience and love and service for Him.

And this is where the other aspect of doing good deeds for the Lord comes in which is what I mentioned earlier. How are we to be zealous for good deeds, or eager to do good deeds, as we saw in Titus 2:14?

The word eager or zealous in the Greek is *zelotes* which is where we get our English word zealot.

The idea here is that God desires for us to be zealots when it comes to loving and serving Him and doing the kind of good deeds which bring Him glory. It doesn't mean being fanatical in a bad sense where we bring attention to ourselves, but there is a zeal which only wants to follow and obey our Lord because He followed and obeyed the Father's will as He went to the cross for us.

Some might consider Christ's obedience radical. And it was, to the extent that nothing would keep Him from loving and doing the Father's will as He took our place on the cross to make this eternal relationship possible for us.

We need to be the kind of zealous believers who earnestly and passionately desire to know and love our God more and more each day.

ISA 58:2 "For day after day they seek me out; they seem eager to know my ways, as if they were a nation that does what is right and has not forsaken the commands of its God. They ask me for just decisions and seem eager for God to come near them."

Being eager to do God's will is not always synonymous with being emotionally excited. It is a realization that despite how we may feel at any given moment we are still called to love and serve God. Jesus' emotions were not the kind that enjoyed being nailed to a cross, but His eagerness and zeal was to look beyond the pain and continue to serve the Father as He secured our salvation.

That doesn't mean we can't or won't get excited about our service, but we must never use that criterion to motivate us or we will never serve under hard circumstances. Rather, we should look to the joy of knowing how it pleases our heavenly Father and how we can bring Him glory as we thank Him with lives of obedience to His word and caring about others before ourselves.

And we should look to the joy of how we can affect the lives of other people, both inside and even outside of the Body of Christ. And as we seek God earnestly in prayer and in His word we will be equipped to be servants of the Most High God and good works will be good because they are coming from the One who is good, our Lord Jesus Christ.

This is why Paul could encourage us to grow in our knowledge of God. It is in this way that we can draw close to Him as He draws close to us.

COL 1:10 "And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God,..."

2TI 3:16-17 "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."

Again, I go back to the motivation for our good works as unto Christ and it's found in an appreciation of the hope we have in our Lord Jesus Christ. As the writer of Hebrews puts it; "Let us hold

unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds." (HEB 10:23-24)

Let me close with an exhortation from this same letter to the Hebrews and may we consider the great love God has bestowed on us in Christ, and may we respond to that love as we move forward in this relationship, and out of gratitude press forward, using the gifts He's give us in Christ.

This is my prayer for you and may it be each other's prayer for one another, knowing that it is Christ's prayer for each one of us.

HEB 13:20-21 "May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, 21 equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen."