

**Ephesians 2:10**  
**(Deuteronomy 30:11-20; Matthew 5:17-20)**  
**“Created in Christ Jesus for Good Works”**

## **Introduction**

Last Sunday, we began looking at these first ten verses of chapter two, where Paul draws a sharp contrast between humanity by nature and humanity by grace. By nature, humanity is spiritually dead, on a path of futility and bondage, deserving only condemnation. But God has chosen not to see us that way. Paul writes that, because of the great love that he has for us and because of what Christ has done for us, God has raised us up to life in Christ, set us free from bondage to futility and given us the power and authority to do the things that bring life rather than death.

We noted that many of us were taught as children the summary of the gospel found in verses eight and nine: “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.” In many ways, the Protestant Reformation was a rediscovery of that great truth, that our salvation is God’s work alone, flowing from his grace and mercy, and is received through faith alone. That is the great truth of the gospel that can never be stated too often.

But it must also always be stated within the context of this entire text, including the verse that immediately follows: “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (2:10). Here we find the great truth of verses eight and nine repeated and expanded, as well as the purpose of our salvation explained.

This morning, we are simply going to unpack verse ten, in the hope that it will give us an even clearer view both of how and of why God has saved us in Christ Jesus.

## **Body**

### **1. “For we are his workmanship”**

If we read this verse too quickly, we will miss this. We are, by nature, spiritually dead (see 2:1). Just as no one receives physical life on his or her own, but that life is, rather, the result of someone else’s life-giving actions, so too, we cannot bring ourselves to spiritual life, but must be given life by another. Paul says that we, who have received such love and mercy from the Lord, should never forget that we have been given this great gift of life by God, and that he has a purpose in giving us spiritual life.

There are at least two very practical effects of remembering this: The first effect resists pride and promotes humility, as we realize that apart from God's grace, we cannot be or do anything of eternal significance. Apart from God's grace, we will continue to create what are sometimes called "false selves," what the apostle Paul in chapter four calls "the old self," as he urges us to "put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires" (4:22). The old self attempts to define and make a person into something of ultimate worth, but in the end, the false self is too fragile, dysfunctional and incomplete, too lacking of the necessary weight and structural integrity, to stand the storms of time.

The second effect brings a deep confidence that we are, indeed, precious and valuable to God, because in his great love, he has made us alive spiritually, has joined us to Christ and set us on a path of freedom and joy, and a path of fruitful service. We can live in the confidence that, because we are his workmanship, we ultimately matter and have eternal significance, whether or not the things we pursue today succeed or fail in the eyes of the world.

## **2. "Created in Christ Jesus"**

Secondly, God has given us spiritual life in Christ Jesus. Just as Paul elsewhere (Colossians 1:15f) speaks of God's Son as "the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created ... all things were created through him and for him," so that even our natural, physical creation is from him, so here Paul emphasizes the second great act of re-creation in Christ, as we are given spiritual life through our union with him.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is not merely the sign that death could not hold God's Son, but it serves also as a sign that the power of death no longer holds sway over all those who are united to Christ by grace through faith. Death has been defeated. We are now alive, not merely physically, but spiritually, with the eternal life won by Jesus Christ in his passion and resurrection victory. Although our bodies must still pass through death, our souls are made alive in Christ, because in him, we are spiritually alive. And his resurrection is the guarantee that we too will at last be raised from death, our bodies made new like that of our Lord, and his Spirit is in us now as the down-payment of what is coming.

That, again, has serious implications for the way that we view others and ourselves. As we saw in the earlier verses of this chapter, God has chosen to see us, not as we are by nature, but as we are by grace, and that means as we are in Christ. We should never accept the harsh judgment of nature, when we have been offered such grace. We need not waste our energy over our failures when God has joined us to Christ in his victory over everything that, apart from grace, would separate us from God's love, and thus from life itself.

If the Father has accepted us and loved us in Christ, then we should learn to accept and rightly love ourselves in Christ – not in a way that causes us to boast in ourselves, but so as to boast in the Lord for lavishing the riches of his grace and mercy upon the likes of us. And, we should view one another in this same way, even those who have hurt us and made life difficult for us. If the Lord “loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses” (2:4-5), should we not love one another?

### **3. “For good works”**

We are not saved *by* good works, but *for* good works. If we miss this, we miss everything. Dr. D. Martyn-Lloyd Jones said this powerfully in commenting on this verse:

If you think that you can abstract forgiveness only from the plan of salvation, you completely misunderstand the plan. When God looked upon you and loved you and began to work in you to make you a Christian, he had already prepared the works which you should live and perform. There is no such thing as justification without sanctification. If there is no beginning of sanctification in you, you are not justified. Do not delude yourself; do not mislead yourself. There is no such thing as faith without works (D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones in *God's Way of Reconciliation*).

There is such an antipathy to good works in children of the Reformation that we too often fail to hear the message of Jesus, of Paul and the apostles, as well as one of the great themes of Scripture: namely, that God created us in order that we might live in loving communion with him and with one another, and that we might do the things that he wants done in this world that he has entrusted to us. He wants to live in this world he has made through us, his sons and daughters, just as he lived here in the person of his Son.

The Bible throughout commends good works, and calls God's people to do good works. But it clearly cautions us not to trust our good works for righteousness before God. We all stand in need of God's grace, and apart from that grace, we remain in bondage to futility. But just as surely, Paul tells us here that God has saved us so that we will do the good things that he wants done in the world and will increasingly live and love as Jesus lived and loved, and gave himself for us.

### **4. “Which God prepared beforehand”**

And so, that brings us to the question of what these good works are, good works that, Paul tells us, God “prepared beforehand” for us to do. They are, I believe, the very elements of a life of loving obedience, gladly following Jesus in the ways of life. If he shows us what it is to be fully human, as we were

created to be, doing the things we were created to do, then how did he live? Jesus' life was clearly lived in the first century Middle East, and so there are elements that do not apply to us. He was a carpenter by trade and an itinerant Rabbi, so again there are unique aspects to his life that have nothing to do with us.

But there are aspects of his life, the emphases that set him apart, that are clearly meant to be emulated: he spoke and lived always in the context of the Kingdom of God. That is, he refused to have his worldview shaped by the prevailing political and cultural powers of his day. Caesar was to be rendered what was his by right, so taxes were to be paid and respect given, and the religious authorities were to be heard and obeyed when they spoke truly and faithfully for the Lord. But his followers were not to love wealth or power, pleasure or prestige. They were to care for the poor and outcast, to bind up the wounds of the broken, and welcome the stranger. They were to love the Lord and to love others and to be willing to sacrifice themselves for others.

If we would know what good works the Lord has prepared, we need only listen to Jesus as he describes the coming judgment:

Then the King will say to those on his right, "Come you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me." Then the righteous will answer him, saying, "Lord when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?" And the King will answer them, "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me (Matthew 25:34-40).

## **5. "That we should walk in them"**

This is not a word for someone else. I have preached it all through my ministry, but have seldom actually done it! And yet, for this we were redeemed. Each one of us is called to walk out the life entrusted to him. No one else can live your life for you. Only I can live my life and only I will give account for my life. Apart from God's grace, that is very bad news. In Christ, it is the best of news, for he has provided all that you and I need in order to be all that he calls us to be, and to do all that he calls us to do.

So, where do we begin?

## **Conclusion**

Let me encourage you to do two things this next week: first, get alone with the Lord and with this verse and examine your life. Let it humble you and let it lift you up. Let it convict you and let it comfort you. Realize how precious you are to the Lord, and how serious he is about you, entrusting you with life in Christ and work to do.

Then ask yourself where you are giving yourself to someone or something because of Christ's love for you, and not for financial gain or human praise, certainly not out of a sense of guilt. Ask the Lord to show you something wonderfully counter-cultural to do for his glory and for someone else's good. Begin to learn to think of your life as a great gift given you in Christ in order that you might make that life a gift back to the Lord and a gift to those whom he has entrusted to you.

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