

The Christian Life

Module 2.8

“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. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”

Ephesians 2:8-10

The relationship between this module and Module 2.6 (Salvation) may best be summarized by Ephesians 2:8-10. Here we see the core truths of Salvation in verses 8-9 and the core truths of The Christian Life in verse 10. As we consider this passage, the truth it proclaims, and the relationship between these two parts of the Evangelical Core, we must make a few important textual observations.

- 1) **Works are not the cause of our salvation.** Paul writes that it is by grace that we have been saved through faith and that this salvation is not of our own doing. It is the gift of God. You and I are left without boast or brag because our salvation is not the result of anything we have done, good works, or otherwise. Our only boast is in the cross of Christ (Gal. 6:14).
- 2) **We are God’s workmanship.** The word *workmanship* is a word that occurs only twice in the New Testament, once in this passage, and once in Romans 1:20.¹ This word is defined by BDAG as “creation or work” and comes from the word (ποιεω) which means “to make or do.”² In both this passage and Romans 1, the focus is on God’s direct agency in making something.

In Romans, Paul states that God is the Creator of the world, which reveals His invisible attributes. In Ephesians, God has not only made the physical body of those that are spiritually dead (Eph. 2:1-4), He has also made those who have trusted in Jesus Christ for salvation spiritually alive. Paul’s point here is to again stress the necessity for salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ as a work that only God can create.

- 3) **We are created for good works that God has prepared beforehand.**³ Not only has God chosen and predestined us for salvation in Jesus (Eph. 1:4), He has also prepared beforehand good works for us to walk in. Notice again, the repetition that our salvation is not the result of good works. We are not created in Christ Jesus *by, through, or in* good works, but rather *for* good works. Once again, Paul leaves no doubt for the reader that our salvation is the result of God and God alone.

¹ *Things that have been made* in Rom. 1:20 (ESV).

² William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 842

³ See also, Titus 3:8.

The words *prepared beforehand* (ESV) translate one verb in the Greek text that is also used only one other time in the New Testament. In Romans 9:23, Paul writes about the riches of God's glory that the "vessels of mercy," which have been *prepared beforehand*, will know and understand. Again, we see God's direct and sovereign agency active in the work of salvation.

We have been created *for* good works which God also prepared in advance. This means that God desires our obedience to His Word, and has prepared this before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4-5, 2 Tim.1:9).

- 4) **For the purpose that we walk in them.** Lastly, Paul tells us that this is God's purpose! God has created for us these good works *so that* (*ἵνα*) we would walk in obedience to Him. In full circle, Paul now returns to the very place he began in chapter 2 and addresses our actions, or works. In verses 1-4 Paul writes that we are dead in our transgressions, and were by nature children of wrath. While we were living physically, we were actually dead spiritually.

Furthermore, there was no amount of law-abiding or good behavior that we could do to merit the grace and mercy of a holy and righteous God because we were walking in open rebellion to Him as children of wrath. But, God...saved us by grace.

Through His choosing, and predestining love which He prepared beforehand, He has not only created us spiritually new (2 Cor. 5:17), but has also created good works for us to walk in. However, God is not just interested in our begrudging submission, but rather our joy. Therefore, walking in obedience to these good works is for our ultimate pleasure, joy, and fullest satisfaction (Psalm 16:11)! This is why David can write in Psalm 19:10 that God's law, testimony, precepts, commandment, and rules, are more to be desired than fine gold and they are sweeter also than honey.

Far too often we are prone to think of obedience to God's Word as a bother to what we will actually find most satisfying. In this way, we think of God's Word as a heavy anchor keeping us away from all of the good things there are to be experienced. Yet, while God's Word does have a restraining function to it, it does not restrain us from good, but rather from evil!

For example, while God's Word in the realm of marriage and sexual morality may restrain us from the opposite of faithful monogamy, this restraint is not an anchor keeping us from something good. Rather, it is a signpost, pointing us to where the fullest freedom and fulfillment of sex is to be found. In marriage, obedience to God's Word actually leads us to what is most satisfying and what will bring lasting joy.

Consequently, as we ponder the good works that we have been called to walk in, works that have been prepared beforehand by God Himself, we need to reconsider how we most naturally think of obedience. For our natural ways of thinking are most likely fleshly ways of thinking that need

to be transformed (Rom. 12:1-2)! The question we must ask ourselves is not “why do I *have to* obey Jesus as Lord?” but rather, “how can I *more and more* walk in obedience to the good works that He has prepared for me as my Lord?”

Furthermore, we must also recognize two other aspects of this relationship between faith alone in Christ, and good works. 1) There is nothing within Scripture that demands we find ways to count these good works, and 2) There is not a specific number of good works that one must do in order for salvation to be completed.

While it is true that we can recognize good and bad trees *by their fruit* (Matt. 7:20) there is zero emphasis placed on a specific quantity of fruit (good works) being needed. It is not as if ten good works demonstrate true salvation more than nine do, or eleven more than ten. Rather, the emphasis throughout the New Testament is that those who have been made alive in Christ will seek to live their lives in obedience to Him as their Lord (John 15:10, 16). They will *make a practice* of righteousness (1 John 3:7) rather than a *practice of sinning* (1 John 3:8).

Thus, while we seek to walk in the Spirit, we must not allow ourselves to be consumed with wonder or fear regarding whether we have done enough. Jesus has perfectly obeyed in our place and all of His perfect righteousness has been imputed to us through our faith in Him (2 Cor. 5:21). We are justified alone by Christ (Gal. 2:15-16).

Similarly, we must also be careful to not create a certain level of obedience that must be achieved so that salvation may be completed. We are not more saved because we have done these good works. Rather, walking in these good works is a demonstration of the gift of salvation that we have received from God.

Lastly, God and God alone has promised to complete the good work He began in us (Phil. 1:6). His work of conforming us to the image of Christ (Rom. 8:29) is done by the Spirit of Christ as we behold the glory of Christ (2 Cor. 3:18). The good works that God has prepared beforehand for us are not works that add to or complete our salvation in any way.

As will be further outlined in Module 3.4 (Regeneration) a true Believer is one who has repented of their sin, trusts only in Jesus Christ for their salvation, and now desires to submit to, and live in obedience to Christ as their Lord. However, in applying this definition, we must readily acknowledge that we do not know the condition of anyone’s heart; whether they have been born again or not. What we can observe, and know to a certain degree, is the fruit that results from a life of repentance, trust, and submission to Christ as Lord. It is to these *good works* that Jesus points to in Matthew 7:21, and Paul writes of in Ephesians 2.⁴

⁴ There is a continual tension present within the New Testament regarding salvation and good works. To be sure, we do not work for our salvation, or our sanctification, and we are not eternally secure because our ability to live a life of good works that pleases the Lord. Justification, sanctification, and glorification are all gifts of God that

Scripture is abundantly clear that we do nothing to contribute or add to God's work of salvation. "Good works" before salvation are only vain attempts at meriting favor with God and are to Him a polluted garment (Isa. 64:6). We are saved only by His grace through faith in Jesus Christ, not of ourselves. Nevertheless, Scripture is equally clear that God has prepared for us good works to do for His glory. These acts of obedience are ultimately for our good and lead to the fullness of joy and pleasures forevermore (Ps. 16:11), as we humbly submit to Christ as our Lord.

are not the result of our works. However, *because* of our salvation Believers are called to "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:12-13), and to "make every effort to supplement your faith..." qualities which keep us from being "ineffective and unfruitful" (2 Pet. 1:5a, 8).