

Ephesians 2:8-10

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[0 : 00] And turn back to Ephesians chapter 2. Ephesians chapter 2, it's on page 976. And if you were around this morning you might remember that we thought about good works in church life.

! And we thought about the danger of confusing working for Jesus with loving Jesus. And so often that is the biggest obstacle isn't it? We think we're loving him when we're busy. But actually we need to rethink that sometimes. And so after this morning I thought it would be helpful to think a bit more about good works in the Christian life.

In church, in general and how we think about that in our lives. And so we're going to focus in on verse 8 to 10 of this astounding passage in Ephesians chapter 2.

So if you look down there. In verse 8 to 10 Paul is super repetitive, isn't he? He says the same thing pretty much over and over again, again and again, four or five times.

[1 : 16] And what he is saying to the Ephesians is, your salvation, Ephesians, has nothing to do with things that you have done. We've said that many times in this church before, haven't we?

That the Christian gospel is not about what you can do for God. It is about what God has done for you. And that is what Paul repeats over and over again in these verses.

And the first thing I think we want to see about good works from this passage is that good works can never be therefore the source of our salvation.

But they are the goal of salvation. Let me read those verses out for us again.

Verse 8. For by grace, by undeserved kindness, you have been saved through faith.

[2 : 25] Through looking outside of yourself to somebody else. That is how salvation has come. And this salvation is not your own doing.

It is the gift of God. It's not a payment. It's not a wage given to us as if we've earned salvation. It's a gift. And he repeats it again, isn't it?

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.

So he repeats the same thing over and over again. Good works can never be the source of our salvation. But they are the goal of our salvation.

You only have to look at the weight that Paul places on what God has done in the passage that we read earlier. To see that good works can never be the source of salvation.

[3 : 28] Look at verse 4. But God being rich in mercy because of the great love with which he loved us. Verse 5 made us alive.

Verse 6 he raised us up. Verse 7 he might show his grace. It is a gift of God. Verse 8. So the thought that my works, the good things that I do in the Christian life, are the source of my salvation, is a thought that he needs to kind of address again and again, isn't it?

It is a thought that just keeps coming back into my mind again and again. But I have to daily take that thought, that big thought, and grab hold of it and deliberately throw it in the skip every day.

So Paul repeats himself here. We live under the false impression that there are a certain number of good things, good works, that need to be done in order for us to have a right relationship with God, to be saved.

But when we do that, we're effectively weighing up the gift that God has given to us. We're weighing up Jesus' death on the cross with things that we can do.

[4 : 52] With cups of tea made, or times cleared up after church, or times reading the Bible, or writing sermons. So what are we saying when we think that?

When we think that we can earn our salvation? What are we saying about God when we do that? We're saying, aren't we, that we don't really think our salvation is a gift.

That he must want something in return. That ultimately the sacrifice must come from me and not him. So that's why Paul repeats himself, By grace you've been saved, not of your own doing. A gift of God, not a result of works. These works, these good works, are never the source of our salvation. But, and here's the thing, they are the goal of my salvation.

Although my works don't bring me a right relationship with God, our good works are a necessary result of my right relationship with God.

[5 : 59] Verse 10, he says to them, You are created, we are created in Christ for good works. So salvation is not from my good works, but it is for good works.

My salvation, it should lead me to a changed life. My right relationship with God will bear fruit. It will have evidence.

So good works are not the grounds of my salvation, but they are evidence of my salvation. I was hearing the story of a teenage lad who had got into the habit of going up to his room and closing the door behind him and locking it to avoid speaking to his stepfather.

There'd been problems in the family and he just wanted to lock himself away. He put a sign on the door saying, Keep out. But one week he'd heard the gospel.

He'd heard this gospel of the Lord Jesus doing all that we need to have done for our salvation. He'd become helpless with Jesus.

[7 : 15] He put his faith in Jesus for his salvation. And he hadn't become perfect overnight, had he, when he did that. But when he'd got home, according to his stepdad, instead of locking his bedroom door, he'd propped it open and replaced the sign with one saying, Come in.

All welcome. Now that teenage lad, he still had many sins to deal with, didn't he? But he had responded appropriately for his age and for his situation.

He was obedient to Jesus. There was evidence of good work in his life. And that's where we see genuine faith in action, isn't it?

Where it affects the nitty-gritty of our lives. He didn't prop his door open to earn his salvation, did he? That just wasn't in his mind. But it was the evidence of the salvation given to him.

John Newton put it really well when he said, I am not what I ought to be, but I am not what I once was, and by God's grace I am what I am. Good works can never be the source of my salvation.

[8 : 34] And if they ever do, I've got to put that thought in the skip and throw it away. But, good works are the goal of my salvation.

So that's the first thing that Paul tells them here. And the second thing is that good works in the Christian life come from God, but are walked in by us.

Good works come from God, but are walked in by us. Have a look again at verse 10 there. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

When you get to verse 10 of this section in Ephesians, I wonder whether you sort of think a bit like me when I first started looking at this.

Paul has done all of the great stuff in verse 1 to 9, which is wonderful and lovely, but now he's getting on to our part of the bargain, isn't he here?

[9 : 37] The word work comes up. God has done his stuff and now it's our turn. We're his workmanship. We're like his minions to do his thing in the church.

But if we think like that, actually we've not really understood what he's saying here. The word workmanship there is not the word for workforce or a group of employees.

But it's more like the word creation. We are his creation. It's the word that is used for a work of art or the work of a master designer or a carpenter, somebody like that.

We are God's masterpiece. We are his great work of art, his handiwork. So we're not primarily the workers for God, but those being worked on by God.

We are the furniture. We are the work of art. We are the canvas that the painter paints on.

[10 : 46] We are the produce, if you like, not the producers. And if you look back to verse 19 of chapter 1, you see there that the greatness of God's power has worked in those who believe in them.

They are benefiting from God's work there, aren't they? But in verse 10, they are God's work. See the difference there? The word workmanship is, it's the same in the Greek Old Testament as in Psalm 100, which we read at the beginning.

Remember that Psalm. Know that the Lord, he is God. It is he who made us and we are his, we are his people and the sheep of his pasture. Now you see the point is the same in that Psalm as it is in verse 10.

The point is that we contribute nothing to being in his pasture, to being made by him, to being his creation.

It's another reason that everything about us, who we are, the reason we are here, the source of our salvation is nothing to do with our good works because we are not the workers primarily, but those being worked on.

[12 : 04] So when it comes to the good works we do, they themselves can only come from God. We can only do good work because God is working with us, firstly.

It means that the works we do in the church are not things that we drum up ourselves on our own because fundamentally we are the work of art, not the workers of art.

We are created in Christ Jesus, Paul says. Jesus says, without me you can do nothing.

Do we honestly think that this church would be here in a generation's time if we weren't attached to Christ Jesus? What's more, our good works come from God because they've been prepared beforehand.

They have a divine origin. not from us but from God. Any good works, it's amazing isn't it, have been pre-prepared for us, decided in advance, ready for us to do.

[13 : 23] So God has not only chosen us for a relationship with him, but he's marked out the path of all the things that we will do. God has made us his workmanship.

We only work because he works. And we only work because he's prepared those things for each one of us in advance to do. So I can only do anything with God's work in me.

And all the good that I do do is prepared by God for me. And that's all from him, for him and to him. So, am I really doing the work at all here? That's the question, isn't it? Am I just a robot? Good works come from God and yet, Paul says, we should walk in them.

verse 10. It's no good thinking that I can just be passive in all of this. God prepares these things for me to do in advance and like a sort of puppet, I'll do them.

[14 : 36] It would be wrong to go to the opposite extreme, wouldn't it, and say that Christianity is never about good works that I really do myself. And we shouldn't sort of be embarrassed about that.

The Bible is full of commands for Christians, for believers to do the right thing, to live in the right way, isn't it? Romans chapter 6, let not sin reign in your mortal bodies.

Present your bodies as living sacrifices. And just note here that we're not talking about a list of jobs, are we? A do's and don'ts of the Christian life.

But the verb in verse 10 is to walk. To walk in these things. We are called to a transformed walk, a lifestyle. Galatians chapter 5 I think is really helpful here, isn't it?

It gives us a helpful list of what it is to walk in the Spirit, to live in the Spirit, to do good works, living along the grain of God's law, trusting in Jesus under the influence of the Holy Spirit, works of love and of joy and of peace, of kindness, of self-control, of goodness, of faithfulness, of gentleness.

[15 : 59] But it is that funny paradox, isn't it? Good works come from God and yet we have a part to play, we should walk in them. It's that verse in Philippians chapter 2, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling because it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

But that paradox, if you think about it, is greatly comforting really, isn't it? As we do work in the church, as we live the Christian life, as one theologian put it, we do not have to do any carrying without remembering that we are being carried.

we work because God works in us. I think it's important to realise that that paradox there is, even though all our good works come from God, we should walk in them.

We are actually doing those things, aren't we? And they are good things. I think we sometimes have a bit of unbalanced thinking on this, often I do.

we know that the things that I do, that the good things that I do are tainted, aren't they? They are affected by my sin all of the time. I don't do things with a pure heart.

[17 : 23] I do things out of impure motives so often. And even the best things we do are like filthy rags. Now, Paul knows that, doesn't he, about the human condition.

but oddly in this verse he still calls these works good. Good works. He doesn't shrink from that, does he?

He doesn't add a little footnote to say good works, asterisk, but really they're a bit like filthy rags. No. The reason he doesn't do that is because they are really good works. because we are God's workmanship. As God's masterpiece, we are created in Christ. And so the things that we do are in Christ.

We are attached to him. And so God really is pleased with the good works that we do because of Christ.

[18 : 29] He is pleased with them because we are attached to Christ. like branches attached to a vine, to a tree, whose spirit, Jesus, produces good fruit in us.

And this does not stop him from being pleased with the good works in themselves, from a regenerated, renewed heart with the Holy Spirit.

He sees our good works and he recognises Jesus in them, doesn't he? Because they are empowered by the Holy Spirit. You see how all of this fits together.

When we think that our good works come from us, well, then yes, they are just filthy rags, aren't they? But good works come from God for us to walk in them.

They are not the source, but the goal of our salvation from God walked in by us. So as we close now, I just want us to think about how this works a little bit in church life and how we talk about these things.

[19 : 46] How do these things work themselves out? When all ways in which we serve the Lord are from him, firstly, there is no room for boasting in church life is there.

Paul says to the Corinthians, what do you have that you did not receive? If you then received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?

There is always that temptation, isn't there, certainly for me, for rivalry, to slip in to things that we do in church, for jealousy of one another's gifts around us, of seeing other people's good works in their lives.

But the gospel, it fumbles me because I can contribute nothing on my own, I cannot do anything, I can't do any good without God working in me.

So we should thank God, shouldn't we, for all of the gifts and all of the good things that go on in this church. Because they are from the Lord, there is no room for boasting even quietly in our hearts.

[21 : 03] But at the same time we do, I think, have a warrant to say to each other, you have done good work, well done.

The works come from God, but we really do walk in them ourselves. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15, by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace towards me was not in vain, on the contrary, I worked harder than any of them.

That is audacious, isn't it? I worked harder than any of them. Paul gives us a warrant, I think, there, to say, no, we have worked hard.

We are allowed to celebrate one another's good works. we can say, well done, you did that. We can do that because they're not the source of our salvation, and it's no dishonour to Jesus to say well done to each other when we see growth and good work going on.

That is not ungodly to do that because we know that those works come from God and they are evidence of his work in us. It's important to note how Paul couches that phrase I worked harder than any of them, isn't it?

[22 : 26] It's in 1 Corinthians chapter 15 verse 10 if you want to look it up later. He says, by the grace of God I am what I am. He says, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.

We can say, well done I worked hard, but actually it was God who did the work. It was his grace in me. And there isn't a person in the church anywhere who doesn't have some work to do, some role to play.

We are all God's workmanship, it's plural isn't it, that we are God's workmanship, collective, it's corporate, together. There is all good work for us to walk in.

Let me tell you a quick story before we finish. It is told that a man went eagerly to a revival meeting, but he was late.

And he found the workman tearing down the tent in which the meeting had been held a few moments earlier. And frantic at missing the evangelist, he decided to ask one of the workers what he could do to be saved.

[23 : 51] The workman who happened to be a Christian replied to the man, I'm afraid sir to tell you that you are too late. You cannot do anything. What do you mean?

How can I be too late? The Christian replied, because the work has already been done. There is nothing left for you to do other than to believe it.

That is the gospel. And when you forget that, take hold of that thought and throw it in the skip. And keep it there. Good works prepared for God, for us to walk in in advance, not the source, never the source, but the goal of our salvation, entirely from and through him, attached to Christ, empowered by him.

So we can say well done to one another, because it is by grace, the grace of God, that I am not what I ought to be, and I am not what I once was, by the grace of God, I am what I am.

Let's pray together.