

**GOD'S WORKMANSHIP**

Ephesians 2:8-10

**Intro:** Ephesians 2:8 and 9 are two of the best known verses in the Bible.

Most of us learned them like we learned John 3:16 – by hearing them read or quoted over and over. By themselves, verses 8 and 9 of Ephesians 2 are not a complete statement of the Gospel because they do not mention Christ. Nor do they state what we need to be saved from. But taken in the context of this epistle, even the verses which lead up to verses 8 and 9, we do have a clear, simple statement of the Gospel of our salvation. They show that there is no way that anyone deserves to be saved, nor is there any work that we can do to contribute to our salvation. They humble man by implying that everyone needs to be saved, at the same time eliminating any possibility of salvation by human works.

However, we make the same mistake in quoting Ephesians 2:8 and 9 that we make in quoting other verses in the Bible, and that is that we take it out of its setting in the epistle and set them off by themselves. Even in doing the memory work that many of us are beginning this week, it is always a good idea to read at least the chapter of the Bible from which our memory verses are taken. Perhaps you have heard the saying that *a text without a context is a pretext*. A text is any portion of Scripture. Its *context* is the verses which lead up to it, and those that follow the text. A *pretext* is false reasoning to accomplish some hidden motive. Some people say that you can make the Bible say anything you want it to say. That may be possible if you lift a verse here and a verse there and another verse from another place, but you can't make the Bible say what you want it to say if you consider a text in its context. The Bible is very clear about what it teaches especially regarding salvation. And if there is one subject about which you can't afford to be wrong, that subject is salvation. No one could have been more concerned about the truth of salvation than the Apostle Paul was. For many years in his life he had believed the wrong thing. He believed that you worked to be accepted by God. It transformed his life when he learned, as he said in verse 10 of our chapter, that "we are God's workmanship." The word "workmanship" literally means, that a true Christian is *what God has done*. Salvation is not the result of what we do for God, but it is the result of what God does *for us*, and *in us*.

But let us read these three verses so that we will all know what we are considering today from the Word of God. **(Read Eph. 2:8-10).**

Several weeks ago when we considered the four verses just before our text for today, we had this very important statement in verse 7 of this chapter which tells us why God does what He does. Let me read it for you as we move on to verses 8 through 10:

7 That in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His

grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.  
This tells us that

## **I. GOD HAS DESIGNED SALVATION FOR HIS OWN GLORY.**

We had this presented to us in chapter 1 in a very emphatic way. See vv. 6, 12, 14.

I ran across a quotation this past week that I want to share with you which emphasizes this point very strongly. Here it is:

All God's works, of whatever kind they be, are designed to praise Him. His works of creation proclaim His wisdom and His power: His works of providence display His goodness: His works of redemption magnify His grace. It is of these last that the Apostle is speaking in the preceding context, even all that God has done for us in the Son of His love . . . The Gospel is too rarely viewed in this light . . . but it is as an exhibition of mercy only that we ought to view it (Simeon, Charles, Vol. 17, p. 297).

If we have understood the first three verses of this chapter we can see, as we can in many other Biblical passages, that man by nature is not interested in seeking God, or pleasing God. He is not concerned about the fact that he lives a life of disobedience to God, that he is actually a child of disobedience. The world, the flesh, and the Devil (and all three are mentioned in those verses) are man's chief delight. Man by nature does not desire salvation. He is not even thinking about working for it. "But God," we are told in verse 4, "Who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us," continuing in verse 5, Paul said, "even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us (made us alive) together with Christ." And then at the end of verse 5 we read, "by grace ye are saved" – the very words with which verse 8 begins. Salvation is not traceable to our search for God, nor for our personal merit, nor for things that we have done, because there is no such evidence in human history or in human behavior. Instead we find Paul using the words *love*, *mercy*, and *grace*. Salvation is not *our workmanship*. *It is not what we have done for God, but it is God's doing, and we are going to learn in our SS lessons on Philippians that "He which hath begun a good work in us, the work of salvation, "will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6).* When God began the work of creating the heavens and the earth, He did not stop until He had finished it, and then He declared that it was "good." It pleased Him in every respect. Salvation is called a creation. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5:17, followed by verses 18 and 19:

17 Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature [or some versions translate it, *a new creation*]: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.

18 And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation;

19 To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:17-19).

You cannot save yourself any more than you could have created the world. The creation of the world was God's workmanship, and so is salvation. Salvation is what He does. Nobody will be in heaven because he has saved himself. All of us who are there will be there by His grace. We are "His workmanship."

This is why we sing the hymn, "To God be the glory." We have done nothing to deserve salvation. In fact, we deserve just the opposite. But to show that salvation is by grace, Paul also told us here that:

## II. SALVATION IS "THROUGH FAITH."

But where does our faith come from? Most people, even many who sincerely are trusting in Christ, believe that their faith comes from themselves, that somehow we have been able to figure things out, while others are not able, and so we trust in Christ as something we do for our salvation. They overlook the fact that right after Paul said, "For by grace are ye saved through faith," he said, "and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God."

Now before we think about the wording of Scripture in this verse, let us ask ourselves, "If my faith comes from me, and I can't be saved without it, then does not faith fall into the category of a work that I do which, in turn, results in my salvation. Then, if this is the case, salvation cannot be entirely by grace because I am making my contribution to salvation without which I cannot be saved. And so I have something to glory in as far as my salvation is concerned. And to that extent, salvation is not entirely God's workmanship. It may be mostly His workmanship, but I am making my contribution without which His work will not be complete. And so I do have something to glory in with regard to my salvation. So the hymn should be, "To God be most of the glory, but not all. Part of it is dependent upon my faith."

But aren't we overlooking the very nature of faith. Isn't faith a recognition that we are not sufficient in ourselves, and so we put our trust in God and in Christ to do for us what we cannot accomplish for ourselves. As one writer has said, "(Faith) disclaims all glorying in self, and gives all the glory to Him from Whom it derives its blessing" (*Op. cit.*, p. 299).

But if my faith does not come from me, where does it come from? Let me give you two Scriptures in answer to that question. The first is Romans 10:17 where Paul said, "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." Our faith comes from hearing and hearing and hearing the Word of God. Through reading Ephesians God strengthens our faith. In fact, this is one of the main functions of Scripture. To hear the Word under the blessing of the Lord,

is to have our faith strengthened. And hearing means when I read it for myself, or when I hear it when someone else reads it.

I had a great blessing this week as I went out to Oregon City to visit Stanley Fleschner. When I went into the place where he lives, he was waiting for me in the entrance. We took the elevator to the third floor, went into his apartment, and sat down. And the first thing that he said to me after we got settled, was, “I hope you have brought some Scripture to give to me and to talk to me about it.” And I had been thinking about a passage in the Psalms. He sat quietly, leaning toward me, and listened to me as I read and then we talked together about what I had read. Obviously he was strengthening his faith by hearing the Word.

The other passage I would give you to tell where our faith come from, is Hebrews 12:1, 2, and 3. You will remember that it follows that great eleventh chapter of Hebrews where we are told how many OT saints exercised faith in God. We are not only saved by faith, but we live by faith. And immediately after that great chapter, we come to these words at the beginning of chapter 12:

1 Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us,

2 Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

3 For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds (Heb. 12:1-3).

The Lord Jesus is the Author and Finisher of our faith. The NKJ says that the Lord is the Originator and Perfecter of our faith. When the Lord is preparing to save any person, He gives that person faith to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. So everything about our salvation comes from God as a gift of His grace.

One of our memory verses for this coming week has to do with the work of the Word in our hearts – 1 Thessalonians 2:13:

13 For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.

Now before we leave verses 8 and 9, let’s notice the two negatives that the Apostle Paul put in these two verses.

### **III. SALVATION IS “NOT OF YOURSELVES . . . NOT OF WORKS.”**

If salvation is of God, then it is “not of yourselves,” and if it is by grace through

faith, then it cannot be “of works.”

I think that Paul had two thoughts in mind with these two phrases beginning with “not.” I think that when he said “not of yourselves,” he meant something like what Paul was saying in Romans 5:7-8:

7 For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die.

8 But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

It seems to me that when the Apostle Paul said here, “Not of yourselves,” he was thinking of righteous people and good people, not who are righteous or good in the sight of God, but people who always seek to do what is right, obeying the laws, moral and upright, paying their bills, responsible citizens. That would be a righteous man, unsaved but righteous. A good man is a person who is kind, thoughtful, gracious, always seeking to be helpful to others. Paul said not many people would die for a righteous man. He could be a very proud, self-righteous person, but some would be more likely to die for somebody who lived like they were already saved. I am sure you know people like that. It is easy to feel that some people are already so “good” that they deserve to be saved. Paul said, “No.” The righteous and the good are no more deserving of salvation than the greatest sinner because whatever morality or religious inclinations we have, we are all sinners.

“Not of works” because no amount of good that a person may do can erase a single sin. Everybody who is to be saved, can only be saved by the grace of God and through faith which the Lord bestows upon people as a gift from God. So our works do not save us, or even make us more savable. But we must not overlook the importance of verse 10.

So, in two verses Paul indicates that all people can only be saved “by grace . . . through faith” – and there are no exceptions. **But** Paul hastened to add in verse 10:

#### **IV. SALVATION IS NOT BY WORKS, BUT ‘UNTO GOOD WORKS.’**

This verse (10) sounds a note that is too often neglected in these days. When the Bible speaks of “good works” it is speaking of the transformation that always takes place when a person is saved by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. No Christian is perfect, even those who have known the Lord for many years. But all Christians are new creatures who live lives of obedience to God and consequent holiness. *If there is no change, there is no salvation.* And this change is not something that is temporary; *it is permanent!* God has ordained that it be so. The word “walk” speaks of the way a person lives. In

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verse 2 we are reminded that before we are saved we “walked according to the course of this world,” and in verse 3 Paul said “we all had our conversation [conduct] in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.” We have not all sinned to the same extent, but we have all sinned. We lived in sin and disobedience to God. But now we no longer walk in sin, but we walk in “good works,” meaning holiness of life.

The Apostle Peter agreed thoroughly with the Apostle Paul. Both wrote under the direction of the Holy Spirit. Peter’s words were:

14 As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance:

15 But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation;

16 Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy (1 Peter 1:14-16).

The Apostle John sounded the same note in 1 John 3:9:

9 Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.

In James 1:21-24 we read:

21 Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.

22 But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.

23 For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass:

24 For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.

And last, but certainly not the least, the words of our Lord Jesus Christ in Matthew 7:22-23:

22 Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?

23 And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.

The testimony of Scripture is overwhelming that if a life of sin has not been changed into a life pursuing holiness, then there is no salvation.

**Concl:** How should all of this effect us?

First, we need to take a good look at our own lives, to make sure that the

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evidence of salvation is to be seen in our daily walk. If it isn't, we need to seek the Lord to save us. John 3:16 is still true. If we see in our lives a love for God and His Word, a love for His people, and a desire to be holy, then we need to praise the Lord daily and seek day by day to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The evidence that we are saved should humble us that such a Savior would condescend to save sinners like we are.