

SAVED FOR GOOD WORKS
EPHESIANS 2:10

Five hundred and two years ago this week, a lone monk posted 95 topics of debate for the church of that day (what we now know as the Roman Catholic church). He didn't want to bring down that church; he simply wanted to reform it. His topics set in motion the creation of a new church of protesters, called the Protestant Church — a church of which you and I are members.

We need to remember that the debate between the Protestants and the Roman Catholics in the Reformation was not over grace, faith, and Christ — the debate was triggered by the word *alone*. The question was whether there was anything a man could do to bring about or enhance his salvation. Much of the debate, then, was around the topic of works — what is the role of works in the salvation of an individual?

The debate is not over. There is still a vast chasm between what Rome believes and what we believe. Notice how RC explains a believer's cooperation with grace to merit salvation:

Grace is first and foremost the gift of the Spirit who justifies and sanctifies us. *But grace also includes the gifts that the Spirit grants us to associate us with his work, to enable us to collaborate in the salvation of others and in the growth of the Body of Christ, the Church....* [my emphasis]

The merit of man before God in the Christian life arises from the fact that *God has freely chosen to associate man with the work of his grace*. The fatherly action of God is first on his own initiative, and then follows man's free acting through his collaboration, so that the merit of good works is to be attributed in the first place to the grace of God, then to the faithful. Man's merit, moreover, itself is due to God, for his good actions proceed in Christ, from the predispositions and assistance given by the Holy Spirit.... [author's emphasis]

Since the initiative belongs to God in the order of grace, *no one can merit the initial grace of forgiveness and justification, at the beginning of conversion*. Moved by the Holy Spirit and by charity, *we can then merit* for ourselves and for others the graces needed for our sanctification, for the increase of grace and charity, and for the attainment of eternal life. Even temporal goods like health and friendship can be merited in accordance with God's wisdom. These graces and goods are the object of Christian prayer. Prayer attends to the grace we need for meritorious actions. [author's emphasis] [Catechism, §2003, 2008, 10.]

So the believer is equipped (and required) to provide his own merit to achieve his own salvation. He can do things that provide atonement and freedom for his own sin.

Further, he can also provide merit for the sins of others through indulgences. These indulgences are "a remission...of temporal punishment due to sins whose guilt has already been forgiven, which the faithful Christian who is duly disposed gains under certain prescribed conditions through the action of the Church which, as the minister of redemption, dispenses and applies with authority the treasury of the satisfactions of Christ and the saints." [§ 1471.]

In this “Treasury” are the works of Christ and

“...the prayers and good works of the Blessed Virgin Mary. They are truly immense, unfathomable, and even pristine in their value before God. In the treasury, too, are the prayers and good works of all the saints, all those who have followed in the footsteps of Christ the Lord and by his grace have made their lives holy and carried out the mission the Father entrusted to them. In this way they attained their own salvation and at the same time cooperated in saving their brothers in the unity of the Mystical Body.” [§ 1477.]

How are these indulgences received?

“An indulgence is obtained through the Church who, by virtue of the power of binding and loosing granted her by Christ Jesus, intervenes in favor of individual Christians and opens for them the treasury of the merits of Christ and the saints to obtain from the Father of mercies the remission of the temporal punishments due for their sins....

“Since the faithful departed now being purified are also members of the same communion of saints, one way we can help them is to obtain indulgences for them, so that the temporal punishments due for their sins may be remitted.” [§1478-9.]

So the self-sufficient, self-righteous, meritorious work of sinners that Luther and the other Reformers fought against, as a form of Pelagianism is alive and well today. The popular belief is that man is scarred by sin, but not mortally wounded and dead. He has a form of life that enables him to achieve merit before the Lord. And he has enough merit left over that he can even attribute some of his righteousness to the accounts of others so that they can be released from their temporal punishment in Purgatory more quickly.

Can our works do this? No. Then what is the role of works in salvation (or is there a place for works)? Works *are* an essential part in the equation of salvation — but not in the manner suggested by Roman Catholicism. Here is how Paul says it in Ephesians 2:10 —

GOD HAS SAVED US BY AN ACT OF RE-CREATION TO LIVE HOLY LIVES.

God has saved us not by means of our good works, but He has saved us — who are incapable of good works — so that we might live a life of godliness and good works. This passage is Paul’s definition of what it means to be a Christian. This verse offers *three hallmark declarations* of our salvation — *three reformation truths* (not of *the* Reformation, but for the reformation of our own lives and hearts).

1. God **SAVED** Us
2. God Saved Us to Do **GOOD WORKS**
3. God Saved Us for the Purpose of Living **HOLY** Lives

This verse offers three hallmark declarations of our salvation — three reformation truths for the transformation of our own lives and hearts.

1. God SAVED Us

- That *God* has saved us and is responsible for salvation has been dominant theme of Ephesians —
 - ✓ Chapters 1-2 could be called — “God’s Great Salvation” (Father, Son, HS)
 - ✓ Notice particulars — 1:3, 4, 5, 7, 11, 13, 18, 19, 20; 2:1, 4, 5, 6, 8-9. Sixty references to God in ch. 1!
- Now look at the first clause in this verse — ***For we are His workmanship*** —
 - ✓ **For** = This word relates this verse to the previous vv. — the reason we are saved by grace (and not ourselves) is because we (in our salvation) are the created workmanship of God.
 - ✓ **we are** = note vv. 1ff, 8-9 — ***you***. Now, Paul says “we” — every believer is in the same position — all!
 - ✓ Additionally, the vb. **are** points to the fact that the believer is *presently* God’s workmanship
 - ✓ ***His workmanship*** = from the root, “something made, a work, a poem” it was used in Gk. lit. of a work of art by any craftsman, such as a metalworker fashioning a crown.
 - F. F. Bruce translates ***workmanship*** as “his work of art, his masterpiece” — emphasizing that believers in Christ are the culmination of all God’s creative work — priceless masterpieces
 - Michelangelo was asked what he was doing as he was chipping at a large rock — “I’m liberating an angel from this stone.” This is what God is doing in our re-creation.
 - The Scriptures regularly picture God as the Potter who is the Creator of man —

Is. 29:15-16 *Woe to those who deeply hide their plans from the LORD, And whose deeds are done in a dark place, And they say, “Who sees us?” or “Who knows us?” You turn things around! Shall the potter be considered as equal with the clay, That what is made would say to its maker, “He did not make me”; Or what is formed say to him who formed it, “He has no understanding”? (cf. also 45:9)*

- Not only is God the physical creator, but He is also the creator of spiritual life, the one who fashions sinful created man into redeemed man that glorifies God, which was the picture we saw in **Rom. 9:21-23** (quoting Jer. 18:1ff). In His sovereignty, God not only brings us to salvation, but He also works to produce our sanctification —

Is. 64:8-9 *But now, O LORD, You are our Father, We are the clay, and You our potter; And all of us are the work of Your hand. Do not be angry beyond measure, O LORD, Nor remember iniquity forever; Behold, look now, all of us are Your people. Cf. also **Rom. 9:19ff***

“The most important fact about the Christian is that he is a new creation, a new creature. God the Creator, God the Potter the Artificer, God the Great Maker, the great Workman, has brought something into being in my life that was not there before — that is what makes me a Christian.” [Lloyd-Jones]

- ✓ The great masterpiece of God the Artisan is the lump of clay (me) that has been “worked” into a worthy worshipper of Him — sin is removed and fellowship restored. *God has saved us.*
- This verse teaches that good works are the result of salvation, not the reason for salvation —
 - ✓ **For** connects this verse with the previous — the reason we cannot boast is because of **workmanship**
 - ✓ The pronoun **His**, used with **workmanship**, emphasizes that the salvation is *God's* work. If we are His workmanship, our salvation is not our own work, but the gift of God to us and for us.
 - ✓ In salvation, we are created **for** good works, not because of good works — i.e., good works follow salvation (they are our goal), they do not precede salvation.
 - ✓ God is the One who **prepared** the good works for us — we did not offer them to Him.
- The British statesman, Winston Churchill, was also an amateur painter. After his death in 1965 one of his paintings was given to Detective-Sergeant Edmund Murray, who had served as his body guard for 15 years. A few years later, Murray sold the Churchill painting, and received over \$7500 for it — a substantial sum at the time (about \$50,000 today). When he sold the painting, Murray told the story of showing Churchill some of his own paintings. Churchill said of Murray's work, “Much better than mine. But yours will have to be judged on merit.”
 - ✓ So it is with our works, when we attempt to produce our own righteousness. We will be judged on merit, and no one has any inherent merit.
 - ✓ The natural (ungodly) tendency of our hearts is to attempt to apply grace and attribute righteousness, but only God is able to grant that righteousness. And when we trust Christ, we receive the merit we need. Those who are merit-less are granted the merit and value of Christ, which is worth infinitely more than we are on our own.

God has saved you to live a transformed life. To experience that life, you must adhere to three reformation declarations —
God saved you.

2. God Saved Us to Do GOOD WORKS

- **created in Christ Jesus** = Generally **creation** referred to Gen. 1; not here (4:24; 2 Cor. 4:6; 5:17)
 - ✓ **created** = This act is an act of re-creation, restoring what was lost through the fall; 4:24 emphasizes that the new person is directly opposite of the old person which was corrupted (4:22)
 - ✓ **in Christ Jesus** = i.e., the new creation is brought about by the work of Christ to place us in fellowship with Him. The power that puts us in Christ is also the power that perfects us in Christ by good works.
 - The preposition **in** emphasizes our unity and union with Christ.
 - Because we are identified with Christ, we experience His resurrection power in our lives to produce our sanctification. Cf. Rom. 6:4-6; Gal. 2:20.
 - Paul uses the phrases “in Christ” and “in Him” 21x in Ephesians to make this point (1:3-4, 7; 4:21)
 - ✓ Notice Paul also says **for good works**. This is the *goal* of our salvation (not reason for it). The word **good** refers to those actions that are morally right and beneficial — for us, those around us, and God.
 - ✓ This emphasis on good works is not unique to Ephesians —

- *Titus 2:14 who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds.*
- *1 Th. 5:15 See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all people.*
- *2 Cor. 5:10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.*
- *2 Cor. 9:8 And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed;*
- *Rom. 13:3 For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same;*
- *Gal. 6:10 So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.*
- *Col. 1:10 so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;*

- ✓ It is God’s will that those who are new creatures in Christ will live a life like Christ who saved them
- ✓ Augustine was right when he said that without Christ one is “not able not to sin,” but with Christ, he is “able not to sin.” Not only are we now able not to sin, but it was for this that our salvation was intended — this was the goal of God’s redemption of men through Christ.

"Works are not a condition of salvation; they are a characteristic of salvation." [Gary Inrig]

"No one more wholeheartedly than Paul repudiated good works as a ground of salvation; no one more strongly insisted on good works as a fruit of salvation." [F. F. Bruce]

- **What is the relationship between good works and salvation?** There are three possibilities —
 - ✓ **faith + good works = justification** (classically, this is RC, though *many* others as well). The problem of making good works an element of our justification is that it removes God from the equation and makes us the author of salvation, and ultimately is to exalt us to position of God.
 - ✓ **faith = justification** (works are excluded — “free grace” and a host of libertines, e.g., Rom. 6)
 - The temptation of removing works from salvation is to believe that our salvation is merely forgiveness — wiping the slate of ungodliness clean — so that our consciences are cleared and we are liberated to sin again. Not so.
 - ... This kind of theology will lead to worldliness — when we were created for godliness
 - ... The NT knows nothing of a worldly Christian (Demas, 2 Tim. 4:10; 1 Jn. 2:15-17, 18-19, 20ff)
 - ... The daily work of the gospel is to remove worldliness from the believer and create a distinction from the world, not create an excuse to be like the world.
 - Are you concerned about worldliness in your heart?
 - Are you concerned about how a thousand ungodly desires daily compete for adoration that is only for Christ?
 - Are you concerned about worldliness in your children/grandchildren/parents/friends who give verbal ascent to Christ? These are *eternal* concerns.
 - Paul does not say, “We are God’s workmanship created in Christ Jesus to say ‘I believe’” and then do the evil activities of the world. We are created as God’s masterpieces to reflect Him. (To say we are His masterpiece is to say we look like Him.)
 - ✓ **faith = justification + good works**, which is what Paul teaches here and the rest of Scripture (above).

“Good works do not make a good man, but a good man does good works; evil works do not make a wicked man, but a wicked man does evil works....It is true that faith alone justifies, without works; but I am speaking about genuine faith, which after it has justified, will not go to sleep but is active through love.” [Luther]

“We are not justified by doing good works, but being justified we then do good.” [Thomas Adams]

“The flesh works to make you forget the design (that you are saved to be holy) and think only of the remedy (if you sin you’ll be forgiven). It preaches half a gospel (a twisted gospel) to us: ‘Go ahead and indulge — it’s already paid for.’ Those who fall prey to such deception are evidently many, since the Scriptures go to such great lengths to condemn it (Romans 3:5-8; 6:1-4; Jude 4).” [Lundgaard]

- Now the remaining question, of course, is — “what are these good works?”
 - ✓ “For a work to be good, it must be commanded by God, done by the Spirit of God, coming from an inward principle of grace in a believer, and ultimately done for God’s glory.” [Mark Jones, 70.]
 - ✓ Paul gives examples throughout chs. 4-6 — in chs. 1-3 only 1 imv. (2:11); in chs. 4-6 there are 40 imperatives, denoting many kinds of activities that constitute the good work of the redeemed man.
 - ✓ The ability to do the work of God is dependent on being saved by the power of God. One cannot obey God until he is saved by God, but once he is saved, he *will* be inhabited by the Spirit and the Spirit will produce the kinds of fruit that God would produce. Cf. also Gal. 5:19-24; Tit. 2:14 – 3:3.

God has saved you to live a transformed life. To experience that life, you must adhere to three reformation declarations —

God saved you.

God has saved you for you to do good works.

3. God Saved Us for the Purpose of Living HOLY Lives

- Notice that these good works are ***prepared beforehand*** by God — not just “He intended us to do these works,” but He has actually laid out, prepared and planned the good works we would do.
- By this plan, God not only ordained our salvation, but also intermediate steps to maturity (2 Th. 2:13f)
- that we should walk*** — The vb. “walk” is familiar in NT (4:1, 17; 5:2, 8, 15) — manner of life.
- Not only has God saved us to do good works (occasionally) — but He has saved us with an eternal purpose that we would always live a transformed life of holiness. We are not intended for occasional acts of goodness, but *we are intended to live lives of continual and increasing holiness*.
 - ✓ Cf. **1:4**; Gal 4:19 — “My children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you”
 - ✓ Notice also that Paul does not say that we are to do and live these works *for* God, but that our lives are characterized by living *in* the works prepared by God — allowing God to work His perfecting work in us. Cf. Phil. 1:6; 2:12-13
- Notice the contrast with verses 1-2 — our former manner of life was dead and influenced by world, flesh and the devil; now our life is characterized by life and influenced by the new man & Spirit of God
- Your salvation is not a decision that was made one time and then conveniently forgotten — it is a way of life in which we keep coming back to Christ and His death and resurrection and finding there not only forgiveness for sin, but power to live free from sin.

- If you are not a Christian, this is the heart of the gospel message —
 - ✓ God, through Jesus Christ will free you from the judgment of sin that He will pass one day.
 - ✓ God, through Jesus Christ will free you from the power of sin so you no longer have to sin.
 - ✓ God, through Jesus Christ has made this a way of life (if you have never thought of this as being a way of life, and you don't see any evidence of God performing His work through you, you might examine yourself to see if you really are a Christian.
 - ✓ If you are not a Christian, this is what you must trust and embrace. God is making salvation from His wrath available to you, and with that, He will also make freedom from sin your regular experience.
 - ✓ (This is what my dad might call, "Peanut butter — and jelly, too!")

|| *God has saved you to live a transformed life. To experience that life, you must adhere to three reformation declarations —* ||

|| *God saved you.* ||

|| *God has saved you for you to do good works.* ||

|| *God has saved you for the eternal purpose of living a holy life.* ||

CONCLUSION: Was the Reformation important? Is personal reformation/transformation important?

...consider what was at stake. At its heart the Reformation was a dispute about how we know God and how we can be right with him. At stake was our eternal future, a choice between heaven and hell. And it still is. That our modern world finds the Reformation alien says as much about us as it does about the Reformers. It exposes our preoccupation with this material world and this momentary life. If there is a world beyond this world and a life beyond this life, then it does not seem to matter very much to us—out of sight, out of mind. It is a bizarre position to take when so much is at stake. For the Reformers there was no need more pressing than assurance in the face of divine judgment, and there was no act more loving than to proclaim a message of grace that granted eternal life to those who responded with faith. The Reformation still matters because eternal life still matters. [Reeves and Chester, *Why the Reformation Still Matters*, 18.]

These three reformation declarations combat three potentially disastrous deceptions to my Christian life —

- ✓ That God saves us keeps me from the mistaken belief that my salvation is dependent on me
- ✓ That we are saved for good works keeps me from the mistaken belief that works are irrelevant to my faith. We are not saved by works, but if no Christ-like works follow faith, then there is no reason to believe that there is genuine faith.
- ✓ That we are prepared to live in them keeps me from the mistaken belief that salvation is an event rather than a life.

BENEDICTION: Ephesians 3:20-21