

THE GIFT OF GOD

Ephesians 2:1-10

Key Verse: 2:8

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.”

Black Friday and Cyber Monday have come and gone. To many Americans, Christmas is about shopping, Santa and gifts, more so than the real reason why we should celebrate it. Actually, Christmas is about a gift. But it is not the kind of gifts we exchange—toys, socks, ties, and the like. Christmas is about the gift of God. God gave us the most precious gift—his one and only Son Jesus. In today’s passage, Paul talks about this gift. This passage also teaches us about God’s wonderful work in and around us. Most of all, we learn that we have been saved to do good works that God prepared in advance for us to do.

I. IT IS THE GIFT OF GOD (1-9)

First, we were dead (1-3). Look at verse 1. *“As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins....”* One famous golfer used the word transgression to describe his marital infidelity. But transgression here means one’s intentional disobedience to God. Ever since Adam’s Fall, man’s mind has become crooked. God made man in his own image to live for the glory of God and to become a blessing. But man rebelled against God and died because of his sins. What does it mean to sin? Crime is violating man-made laws, but sin is breaking God’s laws. The consequence of sin is that man is cut off from his Creator God. His relationship with God is broken. This is the spiritual reality of mankind. All of us were dead in our transgressions and sins. Billy Graham says that we are sinners in three ways: we are sinner by birth, as descendants of Adam; we are sinner by choice—we chose to do certain things against God, knowing they are wrong; finally we are sinners by practice—we kept on doing things that offend God.

Look at verse 2. *“...in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.”* What are “the ways of this world”? It is the value system of this world that puts emphasis on physical and material things. And the ways of this world are often at odds with the ways of God. Worse yet, when people are disobedient toward the word of God, Satan, the ruler of the kingdom of the air, seizes the opportunity to ruin their lives.

Look at verse 3. *“All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.”* People crave for sinful things because they are gratified by them temporarily. But sin demands terrible costs from people. Not only they suffer from the guilty feelings the morning after, but sin makes them the objects of wrath. God is invisible, so people don’t pay attention to him. But the wrath of God is real. Romans 1:18 says, “The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the

godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness....” Is there a way out of this terrible spiritual reality?

Second, made alive with Christ (4-7). Look at verses 4-5. *“But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.”* Paul uses three key words to describe salvation—love, mercy and grace, all of them about God, not about us. We have not earned, nor could we have earned our salvation. Salvation is the result of what God does, not what we do. God is love. When we sin against God, we not only violate his law, but we reject his love. It is possible to make atonement for a broken law. But it is impossible to make atonement for a broken heart; and sin not only breaks God’s law but it breaks God’s heart.

“Let us take a crude and imperfect analogy. Suppose a motorist, by carelessly driving, kills a child. He is arrested, tried, found guilty, sentenced to a term of imprisonment and/or to a fine. After he has paid the fine and served imprisonment, as far as the law is concerned, the whole matter is over. But it is very different in relation to the mother whose child is killed. He can never put things right with her by serving a term of imprisonment and paying a fine. The only thing which can restore his relationship to her is an act of free forgiveness on her part. This is the way we are to God. It is not [just] God’s laws against which we have sinned; it is against God’s heart and therefore, only an act of free forgiveness by the grace of God can put us back into the right relationship with him” (William Barclay).

Third, “it is the gift of God” (8-9). Look at verses 8-9. *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.* These verses teach us that salvation is the gift of God. You know what? God gave us the best Christmas gift. He sent his one and only Son to this world to save us from our sin and death. Jesus is God’s Christmas gift to us. What can we say about this gift?

First of all, this is a free gift. A gift cannot be earned. A gift wouldn’t be a gift if you have to work to get it. This means that we cannot earn our salvation. We can try, but we cannot earn it, because it is a gift of God. Some people say things like, “Why do I have to believe in Jesus. I am a good person. I am nice to my neighbors. I help the poor. I am better than many Christians. If they deserve to go to heaven, I deserve more.” But what they need to know is that salvation is a gift of God. Now we may ask the question, “Why didn’t God design salvation so that we could work to earn it?” There are a couple of things we can say about this. First is that God’s standard is very high. Sure some people are more upright morally than others. But the most moral people cannot measure up to God’s standards. So if we were supposed earn our own salvation, we would have been hopeless. This also teaches us that we are not the captains of our lifeboats. We are not the masters of our fate. We cannot save ourselves no matter how much we work. But the good news is that God sent his one and only Son Jesus to die for our sins. Our salvation has been purchased for us. Salvation is by grace through faith without works. What Christ has done is enough. So no one can boast. Now, clearly this was God’s intention. What if we were required to earn even 1% of our salvation? We would have become proud before God, which means that we would have committed the

sin of pride—the sin that the first couple, Adam and Eve, committed. We would have been right back to square one. So God took out the possibility of pride of his salvation plan. Salvation is what God does; it is not what we do. It is a gift of God.

What else can we say about this gift? This gift is given, not purchased. In our materialistic society, everything seems to have a price tag. But we cannot buy our salvation no matter how much we are willing to pay. When the apostles Peter and John visited Samaria and laid their hands on new believers, the Holy Spirit came upon them. When a sorcerer named Simon saw what happened, he was very impressed. So he offered money, saying, “Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.” Peter answered, “May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money!” (Ac 8:20) Then Peter told Simon that the only way he could receive the gift of God was to repent his sin and ask God for forgiveness. No amount of money can buy salvation; it is freely given to everyone who repents and turns to God.

The gift of salvation is also a permanent gift, no take-backs. God is not an Indian giver. He does not take away his gift from a true believer just because he makes a big mistake. For example, Peter denied Jesus three times on the night he was arrested. But Jesus did not hold it against him. He came to see him at the shore of the Sea of Galilee. He cooked breakfast for him, and asked the question, “Simon son of John, do you truly love me?” Jesus reassured Peter that he still loved him. Furthermore, Jesus encouraged Peter to show his love by taking care of his sheep.

The gift of God is also permanent in the sense that it is not like ordinary gifts we receive that break down the next day or lose value after a while. James 1:16-18 says: *“Don’t be deceived, my dear brothers. Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.”* The gift of salvation guarantees eternal life in the kingdom of God. Romans 6:23 says: *For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

What should be our response to God who has given us this tremendous gift? We can never repay him for the gift, nor does he expect us to. Instead, we must thank him and praise him for the gift of salvation. We must live a life that is worthy of his love and grace.

II. “CREATED IN CHRIST JESUS TO DO GOOD WORKS” (10)

Now, if we are not saved by works, what place do works have in the life of the Christian? This is a very important question. True Christianity is a faith filled with good works. And while we are not saved by works, works accompany salvation. Martin Luther said, “We are justified by faith alone, but not by a faith that is alone.” True faith will always reveal itself by accompanying works. As James 2:26 says: *“As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.”* So good works are evidence of the genuineness of our faith.

Let's read verse 10. "*For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*" This verse teaches us profound truths concerning both God's work and ours. First, it says that we are God's workmanship. What does this mean? The word "workmanship" is *poiema* in Greek, from which the word poem comes. This teaches us that we are the work of art created by God. His creation is a work of art. We are amazed to see the stars, the mountains, the oceans, the rolling hills, wild flowers ... that are fascinating exhibits of God's creative genius. From a raindrop or a snowflake, to the Swiss Alps or Niagara Falls, his creation displays his power and majesty.

What is the masterwork of God's creation? There are many things that are so beautiful and magnificent. But there is one creation that transcends all other creations as God's masterpiece. It is we the human beings! If you want to see God's masterwork, just take a look at a baby's eyes. Human eye is amazing. Light passes through the cornea, then through the focusing lens where it strikes the retina, simultaneously stimulating 125 million nerve endings. Millions of micro switches process this information and funnel it down the optic nerve. The optic nerve itself contains one million separate insulated fibers. The image finally reaches the brain where an incredibly complex process translates these impulses into the picture of what we see. All this happens in less than a millisecond. And this is just one part of the human body. What is much more complex is human mind. Think about our emotional makeup and intellectual capacity. Above all, God made man and woman in his own image. Man has or is a soul. We are indeed the masterpiece of God's creation.

So God's original creation of humankind was marvelous. But that's not all. Look at verse 10 again. *For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.* The ultimate creation of God is the one created in Christ Jesus. God poured out his love on man when he created him in his own image. But it is the new creation that fully reflects his love for mankind. Think of what has transpired in us. We have been created not once but twice. We are a new creation in Christ Jesus. The Bible says, "*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!*" (2Co 5:17). God has taken our old self and replaced it with a new self. We have experienced a dramatic metamorphosis of life—more dramatic than the change from caterpillar to butterfly—in which the very nature of our soul has been altered. We could not do it. We're not talking about turning over a new leaf here. We're talking about a new life in Christ. This is really what salvation is all about. Salvation is a work of God. As a Christian, we are a work of God. Indeed, we are his masterpiece. It is from this perspective that we can understand the importance of good works.

So what is the purpose of God's new creation in Christ Jesus? Why did he recreate us in Christ Jesus? Let us read verse 10 once more. *For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.* God did not save us so we could only enjoy his blessings. He did not sacrifice his one and only Son to save us so that we could continue to live a selfish life. Verse 10 teaches us that we have been created in Christ Jesus to do good works. He saved us to serve Christ and to build others up in Christ. Some Christians say, "I am born again," and continue to live the life of the past. But we learn here that we have been

created anew to do good works. The gift of God is free, but it is not cheap. In fact, God paid the highest price to give us the gift—the blood of his one and only Son. How can we cheapen his grace by following our sinful nature?

So we know that we have been created to do good works, not as a condition of our salvation, but as an outcome of our salvation. Then what are some of the “good works” that God wants us to do? How can we find out the good works that God prepared in advance for us to do? This is something we must discover by carefully studying the word of God and through our personal prayer. But one thing is clear. God has called all of us to be active in sharing the gospel of salvation with people who are still groping in darkness. All four gospels end with the supreme command of Jesus to go out to the world and preach the gospel to the end.

We can also find the clue as to what good works God wants us to do in our life by studying what Jesus did in his public life. What did Jesus do? He proclaimed the kingdom of God. He healed the sick. He cast out demons. He wanted his disciples to do the same. Jesus also took care of the widows, orphans, and the people who were neglected. To find exactly what God wants us to do in our life, we must be sensitive to what God is telling us as we study the word of God. We must listen to God as we pray.

As we encounter many opportunities for mission, we need to ask ourselves a very important question. Do not ask, “What would Jesus do?” as if he were not present. He is present. He lives in us! Rather, we should ask, “What will Jesus do through me?” We can be sure that if God has placed this good work opportunity in our path, then he has prepared us for the work, and the work for us.

In today’s scripture we learned that we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. We cannot earn our salvation by these works. Salvation is the gift of God. But we reveal our salvation by doing good works in Christ.

This Christmas, we may not get the present that we really want. But we can still have joy and peace in our hearts knowing that God has already given us the greatest gift of all—his one and only Son Jesus. Praise Jesus who came to this world to serve sinners like us! May God help us to live a life that is worthy of his love and grace!