

## Ephesians 2:8-10

**Pastor:** Ephesians 2:8-10: We are saved by grace, not as a result of works.

**“For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Messiah Yeshua for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.”**

**2:8-10** Ephesians 2:8-10 are extremely important for anyone reading Ephesians to take note of, **as they lay out the proper place of both salvation by faith and the works that God requires of us.**<sup>1</sup> It is in this section where Paul explains to his audience how they have been saved, and the responsibilities that are incurred from such salvation.

**2:8** Paul begins by telling his readers, “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God” (Ephesians 2:8, NIV). Here the perfect participle *sesōsmenoi* (σεσωσμένοι), “ye are having been saved” (YLT), describes an ongoing yet completed action with continuing results. It is not as though the salvation provided is something that is distant and in the future that cannot be touched; it is something that occurs at the moment of conversion and can be partaken of immediately in the life of a Believer. This salvation comes *dia pisteōs* (διὰ πίστεως) or “through faith,” meaning by placing trust in the redemption that Messiah Yeshua offers by His sacrifice. This salvation is *Theou to dōron* (θεοῦ τὸ δῶρον) or “of God the gift” (YLT), with God placed first in the Greek syntax as it is by no means of human origin or attainable by human effort. The redemption provided is found only in what God Himself has provided via the selfless offering of His own Son.

**2:9** Paul continues his train of thought saying that salvation is “not from works, so that no one can boast” (Ephesians 2:9, HCSB). Salvation is *ouk ex ergōn* (οὐκ ἐξ ἔργων) or “Not of works” (KJV), in this case meaning “the result of what anyone can do” (Williams New Testament). These *erga* (ἔργα) are to be differentiated with the *ergōn nomou* (ἔργων νόμου) or “works of law” that Paul confronts in Galatians<sup>2</sup> (and/or Romans),<sup>3</sup> which specifically related to the sectarian *halachah* of branches within First Century Judaism, as opposed to just general observance of the Mosaic Torah.<sup>4</sup> Here, Paul is speaking of “works” in general terms. Isaiah 64:5-6 clearly states what human works in and of themselves mean to God:

“You meet him who rejoices in doing righteousness, who remembers You in Your ways. Behold, You were angry, for we sinned, *we continued* in them a long time; and shall we be saved? For all of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment; and all of us wither like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.”

The Prophet Isaiah says *u'k'beget idim kol-tzedeqoteinu* (וְכִבְּגַד עֲדִים כָּל-צְדָקֹתֵינוּ), “and all our righteousness is like a worn-out garment” (ATS). Human works in and of themselves, even those done with a tenor of “righteousness,” mean very little to the Lord. And, it is not inconsequential to consider the fact that the Hebrew term *idah* (עֲדָה), used here for the “rag” (NJPS), specifically relates to the “menstruation period” (HALOT).<sup>5</sup> The Message probably gets the closet in trying to capture this idea, even though it avoids the obvious anatomical connections: “Our best efforts are grease-stained rags.” In more contemporary language, by describing human righteousness as *beget idim*, Isaiah 64:6 is actually saying that *it is like used tampons!* Perhaps we could also say that such human righteousness is like a dirty diaper, or even a used barf bag? It is simply a receptacle of waste. Human works, even those performed in righteousness, will not result in inheriting salvation. This much is made clear by the decrees of Yeshua:

<sup>1</sup> This entry has been adapted from the commentary *Ephesians for the Practical Messianic*.

<sup>2</sup> Galatians 2:16(3x); 3:2, 5, 10(2x).

<sup>3</sup> Romans 3:20(2x), 27(2x), 28.

<sup>4</sup> This is discussed in specific detail in Chapter 11, “What Are ‘Works of the Law?’”

<sup>5</sup> Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, eds., *The Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 2 vols. (Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill, 2001), 1:790.

“Therefore they said to Him, ‘What shall we do, so that we may work the works of God?’ Yeshua answered and said to them, ‘This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent’” (John 6:28-29).

The response of our Lord is clear and simple: one is to believe or have faith in the Messiah whom God sent. This too is exactly what Paul says in Ephesians 2:8-10. A person is saved by God’s grace, and it is not the result of any human works. The reason it does not come via human action is “so that no one may boast.” Obviously, if one’s human works are tantamount to some kind of garbage or rubbish—especially compared to the holiness of God—no one *should want* to boast in these actions. And perhaps more importantly, boasting is to come about *only* by what Yeshua has enacted in one’s life. The Apostle Paul says that Believers are those “who worship in the Spirit of God and glory [boast, NRSV] in Messiah Yeshua and put no confidence in the flesh” (Philippians 3:3).

**2:10** While many lay readers often stop, and only read Ephesians 2:8-9, no responsible interpreter can miss Ephesians 2:10. Here, the Apostle Paul makes a very important statement regarding the placement of works in one’s salvation experience: “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (RSV). Paul says that Believers *esmen poiēma, ktisthentes en Christō Iēsou* (ἐσμεν ποιήματα, κτισθέντες ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ), “are workmanship, created in Messiah Yeshua” (my translation). It is not insignificant at all that Paul employs the verb *ktizō* (κτίζω), which is used in “17 out of the 46 instances” in the Greek Septuagint “in which [the Hebrew reads] *bārā’* as ‘to create’” (TDNT).<sup>6</sup> A notable instance where *ktizō* renders *bara* (בָּרָא) in the LXX is Deuteronomy 4:32 where “God created man on the earth.”<sup>7</sup> Paul’s usage of *ktizō* is important, because he is describing an act of God, not unlike His original creation of man and woman.

Via the work of Yeshua the Messiah, redeemed persons are fashioned into God’s *poiēma* (ποίημα), perhaps His “masterpiece” (NLT). In Plato, *poiēma* can be used to designate “a poetical work, poem” (LS),<sup>8</sup> and in a classical sense was used to describe various forms of art or artwork. Paul cannot be ruled out from considering this kind of usage for *poiēma*, considering his audience in Asia Minor, but is certainly describing how this term would be used in the LXX to describe God’s work of forming man. Psalm 91:4 says, “For thou, O Lord, hast made me glad with thy work [*tō poiēmati sou*, τῷ ποιήματί σου]<sup>9</sup>; and in the operations of thy hands will I exult” (LXE). Likewise in Psalm 142:5, “I remembered the days of old; and I meditated on all thy doings: *yea*, I meditated on the works of thine hands [*poiēmasin tōn cheirōn sou*, ποιήμασιν τῶν χειρῶν σου]”<sup>10</sup> (LXE). These are the sorts of sentiments Paul would have had in mind, as the Psalmist reflects on the great work of the Lord, the masterpiece that humankind was created to be.

The *poiēma* that the Father has created us to be in the Son is a reaffirmation of Ephesians 1:14; Believers have been created *epi ergois agathois* (ἐπὶ ἔργοις ἀγαθοῖς) or “for good works.” Believers have been specifically created for good works *hina en autois peripatēsōmen* (ἵνα ἐν αὐτοῖς περιπατήσωμεν), “so that in them we would walk” (my translation) or “to devote ourselves to the good deeds for which God has designed us” (NEB). This would be tantamount to setting oneself on an *halachic* path (“walking”) that contributes to the ideal of human wholeness, one which fully lives out the imperatives of Micah 6:8: “He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” We are to live in the world in a definite way that will be pleasing to our Heavenly Father.

Liberals who deny Pauline authorship of Ephesians (or perhaps any “Pauline” involvement) have sometimes thought that Ephesians 2:10 and its emphasis on “good works” is a so-called “slip” back into Judaism, and thus from their perspective dead legalism.<sup>11</sup> Yet, here in Ephesians 2:10 we see absolute

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<sup>6</sup> W. Foerster, “*ktizō*,” in TDNT, 484.

<sup>7</sup> Heb. MT *bara Elohim adam al-ha’eretz* (בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אָדָם עַל-הָאָרֶץ).

Grk. LXX *ektisen ho Theos anthrōpon epi tēs gēs* (ἔκτισεν ὁ θεὸς ἄνθρωπον ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς).

<sup>8</sup> LS, 651.

<sup>9</sup> Heb. MT *ma’asei yadeyakha* (מַעֲשֵׂי יָדָיִךָ).

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Peter T. O’Brien, *Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Letter to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 180.

agreement between Paul and Yeshua, who says “Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16). This word occurs immediately before His intention to fulfill, versus abolish, the Torah (Matthew 5:17-19), and good works as specified in His Sermon on the Mount that certainly have a high priority for every person who has placed their trust in Him to perform.

We see in Ephesians 2:8-10 that works are not considered to be the way to salvation, but come as a definite evidence of it and of the spiritual transformation of a person. On this point, the Apostle Paul and James the Just (cf. James 2:4-26) are in complete agreement with one another, despite any claims to the contrary. It is also concurrent with the pattern of how God redeemed the Ancient Israelites from their slavery in Egypt, before bringing them to Mount Sinai to give them His Torah (Exodus 20:1-2). Good works and obedience were to come forth from Ancient Israel as a consequence of the people loving Him (Deuteronomy 5:29; 30:6, 11-14).

The reason that good works are imperative for Paul’s audience should not be difficult for any of us to understand. Ralph P. Martin asserts that good works compose “the necessary consequence of their new life in Christ as His new creation,”<sup>12</sup> not as the source of their salvation. Peter T. O’Brien states, “Good works are God’s design for [His] new creation and flow from his gracious salvation as its consequence or fruit.”<sup>13</sup>

We will see a later reaffirmation by Paul in his letter to Titus, where he tells him that Yeshua “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” (Titus 2:14). He also instructs Titus, “I want you to speak confidently, so that those who have believed God will be careful to engage in good deeds” (Titus 3:8). This is all concurrent with God’s original call upon Ancient Israel, which was to obey the Lord as a kingdom of priests (Exodus 19:5), a special people for His own possession (Deuteronomy 4:20; 7:6; 14:2). To suggest that these good works *run completely contrary* to what the Lord originally desired His people to be as specified in the Torah would be entirely confounded (cf. Matthew 5:16-17).

The good works that Believers are expected to fulfill are first detailed in the Torah, and it is surely a sad occurrence today that many Christians think that Torah obedience—especially one led by the Spirit of God as part of the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-33; Hebrews 8:8-12)—leads to a life of legalism and bondage. The original intention of the Torah was “You shall therefore love the LORD your God, and always keep His charge, His statutes, His ordinances, and His commandments” (Deuteronomy 11:1), with love for Him leading to proper obedience. While many commentators and interpreters have difficulty connecting these concepts together—particularly that Paul’s “good works” could have any origins in the Torah—many do rightfully say that “works” are connected to the salvation experience *as a definite result of it*.

Lincoln writes that “good works are not the source but the goal of the new relationship between humanity and God. Salvation is not ‘by works’ but ‘for works.’”<sup>14</sup> Witherington also validly remarks, “These works are done not to earn God’s praise or favor but out of a grateful heart and obedient spirit, responding to the gift of salvation. Believers were not simply saved simply to revel in the benefits of the salvation experience.”<sup>15</sup> The challenge is not with theologians who recognize the necessity of good works; the challenge is that God’s Torah is most often removed from the equation of defining good works. The essence of what God desires is seen in Deuteronomy 5:29: “Oh that they had such a heart in them, that they would fear Me and keep all My commandments always, that it may be well with them and with their sons forever!” Obedience to the Lord will naturally bring a sense of well-being with it; the intention being *l’hem v’l’benei’hem l’olam* (לְעַלְמֵי לְבָנֵיהֶם וּלְבָנֵיהֶם). And somehow this is inconsistent with Paul’s teaching in Ephesians 2:10?

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<sup>12</sup> Ralph P. Martin, “Ephesians,” in D. Guthrie and J.A. Motyer, eds., *The New Bible Commentary Revised* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), pp 1105-1124., 1111.

<sup>13</sup> O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 180.

<sup>14</sup> Andrew T. Lincoln, *Word Biblical Commentary: Ephesians*, Vol. 42 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1990), 114.

<sup>15</sup> Ben Witherington III, *The Letters to Philemon, the Colossians, and the Ephesians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Captivity Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 256.

Do take serious note of the fact that the Torah itself never said that by keeping it people could have eternal life! Deuteronomy 5:29 only speaks of a state of well-being that will be experienced by the society which values God's Instruction. Bruce makes the important conclusion regarding Ephesians 2:10, "They are the good works which reflect the character and action of God himself. God gave his people the law that they might be like him,"<sup>16</sup> and he actually proceeds to quote Leviticus 11:44: "For I am the LORD your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy."<sup>17</sup> All of this undeniably requires God's Spirit to be resident inside of a person. As Paul writes to the Colossians, "we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please *Him* in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work [*en panti ergō agathō*, ἐν παντὶ ἔργῳ ἀγαθῷ] and increasing in the knowledge of God" (Colossians 1:9-10). Similarly, each of us should pray to the Lord each day that He would give us the ability fulfill every good work!

It is sad that while seeing how good works are indeed to follow the salvation experience, many Christians cannot connect these good works with obeying God's Torah. Yet, it is also very sad that with as clear a teaching as Ephesians 2:8-10 give on the relationship of works to a person's salvation, that much of today's Messianic movement still cannot understand it. Many in our faith community *do believe* in a salvation-by-works paradigm, and one that ironically enough is not consistent with ancient Jewish views. How we remedy this problem is entirely up to us in the days ahead, especially as the Messianic movement expands and refines its theology.

Andrew T. Lincoln honestly does say, "notion of being created for a life of obedience for which God alone is credited can be found in various forms of Judaism."<sup>18</sup> God as the Author of life desires His children to obey Him and His commandments. With this in view, it is very sad that Lincoln has to assert "the idea [seen in Ephesians 2:10] is no longer simply synonymous with obedience to the Torah,"<sup>19</sup> and like many Christian interpreters believes that the Law has been completely abolished by Yeshua. Yet, the Rabbinic ideal seen in the Mishnah is "If you have learned much Torah, do not puff yourself up on that account, for it was for that purpose that you were created" (m.*Avot* 2:9).<sup>20</sup> This is not that unlike the closing verse of Ecclesiastes: "The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man" (12:13, RSV). Still, it is true that obedience to God is to not exclusively be focused around the Pentateuch; a proper obedience to God is more than just adherence to rules as it **must involve a dynamic relationship and steadfast communion with Him.**

Some demand that Torah observance is required as the source of one's salvation, in spite of the clear injunction against it. What we see in the Biblical record is that God provides salvation—now specifically via the sacrificial atonement of His Son—and this naturally leads to good works. This would be fully concurrent with the New Covenant promise of God writing His Torah onto the hearts of His people (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:25-27). The Holy Spirit regenerates a person at the time of conversion, and then as a son or daughter of God grows in faith and matures, good works naturally manifest themselves. These good works come as clear evidence that the love of God has oriented the new heart toward Him and His will.

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<sup>16</sup> F.F. Bruce, *New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 291.

<sup>17</sup> Of course, Leviticus 11:44-45 continues by giving a specific way God's people can be holy:

"And you shall not make yourselves unclean with any of the swarming things that swarm on the earth. For I am the LORD who brought you up from the land of Egypt to be your God; thus you shall be holy, for I am holy."

<sup>18</sup> Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 114.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Neusner, *Mishnah*, 676.