

**God's People Part 1: Who We Are
Equipped
Ephesians 2:8-10**

**PROMOTE HONDURAS and GUATEMALA TRIPS, Feb 22 interest meeting at 11:30 am
worship ... an opportunity to do God's work!!**

Introduction: Work is not a consequence of sin. Immediately after creating Adam, God assigned him work to do, which, by the way, God did with Him. Both Adam and Eve were given the work of ruling and managing everything on the earth with God, as well as initiating the multiplication of humanity, who would fill the earth and labor with God and one another as well.

God equipped human beings with capabilities to create and produce unlike anything else in the universe. Nothing else in the universe has even been remotely given the physical or mental capacity to do what humankind can do. For instance, by an immeasurable number, the most powerful force in our solar system is the Sun. It not only creates the energy that lights and warms the Earth, but its gravitational pull is so powerful that it causes everything in our solar system to orbit around it! Yet, with all of that incomparable power, the Sun can't decide to do something new or different. The Sun can't decide to move to another location or explore another galaxy. It can't extract minerals from the earth and build buildings with them. It can't come with ideas for business and lift people out of poverty with job opportunities. It can't do anything but sit right where it is and burn because, in all of its colossal power, it has no power to think, act, or feel. Humanity can't make the planets orbit around us, but mankind can think and create in a way that nothing else in the universe can.

Furthermore, since we were made and equipped by God to work, when we don't work, it creates problems not only for society but also for ourselves. Our bodies and minds are literally made to be able to do things, of which the most important is to love God and others. And remember, love is not a feeling but an action, a work!

This is why, when a person spends their life lying around on somebody else's couch, expecting somebody else to take care of them, it is almost guaranteed to be a person who is snowballing down the road of insecurity and depression. It's why the last thing a person battling insecurity or depression needs to happen to them is to be equipped to do nothing; it only feeds the problem! It's why, when a parent or society equips a person to avoid working or fuels their rationale for not working, it actually makes that person's situation worse, not better! It's why one of the negative compounding effects on a person going through a serious health crisis that truly leaves them unable to do anything other than lie in a bed and be taken care of is that they begin to deal with the depression and hopelessness associated with feeling like they can't do anything for others or even themselves. The pain and suffering of what landed them in the bed is negatively amplified by the growing frustration and hopelessness of not being able to do anything that seemingly contributes—work!

On the other hand, when Adam and Eve were cast out of the garden, and thus cast out of fellowship with God, one of the stated consequences was that all work was stained with the effects of sin and the death that the work of sin creates. Since then, work has still been fulfilling because we were made to work, but now that fulfillment is accompanied by pain and suffering that is, at minimum, experienced in the disappointment of realizing the inefficiency and vanity of our work! For example, you can build something truly magnificent only to immediately see time and, ironically, even the usage it was created for, destroy it.

No matter how much good you do with your work, the nature of the universe is to take that good and immediately begin to erode it, as if, and in fact, it is, that the work itself, no matter how good it appears to be, is already infected with death. You see, when Adam sinned, death entered the world not as something in the corner that may or may not affect us, but as the new reality of everything in the universe. Everything still works, but it's no longer equipped to do it the way it was created to do it, because it's been cursed to be incapable of doing it the way it was created to do it!

Now, with that in mind, today, we are going to study one of the better-known passages in the Bible. It's a passage often used to teach a doctrine the verse certainly teaches, but it's rarely used to teach the primary subject matter the verse's context and language clearly communicate as its purpose—work!

To understand what I mean, let's begin today's study by reading the passage in the context of the paragraph in which it appears, the passage we studied last week. Paul wrote,

1 And you were dead in the trespasses and sins 2 in which you once walked **[(our works)], following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work **[(Satan's work)]** in the sons of disobedience— 3 among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh **[(our works)]**, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind **[(our works)]**, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. 4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us **[(God's work!)]**, 5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ **[(God's work!)]** — by grace you have been saved **[(God's work!)]**—6 and raised us up with him **[(God's work!)]** and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus **[(God's work!)]**, 7 so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus **[(God's work!)]**.**

Now, watch how the theme of work continues into our passage today.

8 For by grace you have been saved **[(God's work!)] through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works **[(our works!)]**, so that no one may boast. 10 For we are his workmanship **[(God's work!)]**, created in Christ Jesus for good works **[(God's work!)]**, which God prepared beforehand **[(God's work!)]**, that we should walk in them **[(our new work)]**.**

The big idea, that is, the main idea of this paragraph, is the comparison of works. We once could not do the works God wanted us to do, so God did the work that changed our position and disposition so that we could. We were spiritually dead, and as such did nothing but spiritually dead works in the eyes of God. But now, because of the grace of God that saved us from that position and equipped us with a new disposition, we can now walk in and do the spiritually alive works God created for us to do! We are no longer spiritual zombies! We are no longer dead men walking in spiritually dead works that are incapable of accomplishing what we were created to do, but rather, through the work of God in Christ, we have been brought to life and equipped to do the very things we were made to do; the things that not only display the glory of God but give us the real experience of living in His glory. We are now fully equipped to do things that are not in vain and, as such, will not be lost to the sin, death, and the condemnation of this world!

So that's the big idea of Ephesians 2:8-10, but there's a ton of awesome stuff in that idea that will absolutely encourage, challenge, and even change you if you will stop and think about it.

Proposition: Ephesians 2:8-10 reveals two vital truths about how God has equipped us to do His Work.

The first vital truth is that,

(1) We have been equipped THROUGH faith, not by faith. (2:8-9)

A. By definition, work is something that produces something, but the Bible says that even our best works couldn't change the fact that we were sinners. Every work we did was stained with sin and the death that comes with sin! Even the good works we did were impregnated with death! As Paul just spelled out clearly in Ephesians 2:1-4, we were dead in our ability to do anything but live where we were not supposed to (trespasses) and fall short of, or miss the mark of, the purpose we were created to accomplish (sins). Elsewhere, the Bible states,

1. 6 We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away. (Isaiah 64:6)

2. 9 The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it? (Jeremiah 17:9)

3. 10 as it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one; (Romans 3:10)

B. So, if every work we did was flawed and incapable of getting us, or anyone else, out of the reality of sin and death, how were we saved? Simply put, someone else did the work to save us! This is why Paul stated this about God's work in Christ in verses 5 and 6:

Note: **5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—6 and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,**

- C. Notice that **“by grace you have been saved”** is a parenthetical phrase contained by two “em dashes.” It’s like putting something in parentheses or tagging something with an applicable phrase that you want your reader to connect with elsewhere. Typically, it alerts the reader that what was just said links back to something already explained and/or is about to be explained further. In this case, Paul has certainly been explaining the doctrine of salvation by grace since the beginning of the letter, but, as you saw when we read today’s passage, the parenthetical phrase in verse 5 is repeated verbatim in verse 8 to explain the thought Paul tagged to it. Verse 8 reads,
- D. **8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast.**
1. It was the work of God in Christ that rescued us from the condemnation of spending our entire life incapable of anything but dead works, of anything but works done where we aren’t supposed to be doing them, and always missing the mark or purpose of why they are supposed to be done!
 2. The phrase **“gift of God”** further explains the word **“grace”** and, as such, emphasizes that we didn’t earn the right to be rescued; rather, it was something God gave us because He loved us and wanted us to have it, which is why He paid for it and gave it to us. It is VITAL that we don’t gloss over this. We need to understand that just because we didn’t work to make the gift, pay for it, or even deserve to receive it, doesn’t mean it wasn’t made and paid for by someone! I know many of you already know this, but isn’t it amazing how quickly it can become something that is out of sight and out of mind! So let’s take a second to ensure it’s at the front of our minds, and for those who are new to the Bible, bless you with the opportunity to maybe, for the first time ever, have it on your minds!
 - a. **5 But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. (Isaiah 53:5)**
 - b. **“11 I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” (John 10:11)**
 - c. **3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, 4 who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, 5 to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen. (Galatians 1:3-5)**

- d. **9 But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. (Hebrews 2:9)**
 - e. **24 He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. (1 Peter 2:24)**
3. The work of Christ on the cross is what justifies and earns our salvation, but it's the work of the Holy Spirit that literally regenerates our dead souls to be alive and actually be saved! For example,
- a. **26 And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. (Ezekiel 36:26)**
 - b. **9 Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, 10 nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. 11 And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. (1 Corinthians 6:9-11)**
 - c. **5 he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, (Titus 3:5)**
- E. So neither the right to be saved nor how we actually were saved is something we did! Therefore, Paul wrote,
- F. **8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of [your] works, so that no one may boast.**
- 1. There is literally NOTHING I nor anybody else can do to create or gain salvation, so much so that nobody has anything to be praised about. Nobody has anything to be rewarded for achieving when it comes to their salvation. It is ALL to the credit of God's will in the work of CHRIST, and thus He will be justly praised and honored for all eternity!
 - 2. BUT!!! What then is faith? What does it mean to be "saved through faith" if faith is not a work?

3. Faith works, but it isn't a work. I am saved by grace, not by faith. Paul uses this language on purpose to make the point that our faith is not a work that EARNs or accomplishes our salvation, but rather participates in it! God's grace has equipped us to be saved through faith; otherwise, we would fall short!! Left to myself, my faith can never save me!
4. Let me explain it this way. Imagine you're on a volcanic island in the middle of an ocean, and it's getting ready to explode with such force that the island itself is going to be destroyed. Even if you swam away from the explosion, you would still drown in the middle of the ocean. Nothing you could do could save your life. But, suddenly, out of nowhere, a plane landed on the island and invited you to get on. By faith, you got on the plane believing the plane could rescue you, and it did. It took off before the Island exploded and flew you safely to the mainland.
5. The plane did all the work. Neither your belief in the plane nor your getting on the plane had anything to do with the plane's ability to get you off the island to safety. Now, some of you are saying, "But, Austin, the act of getting on the plane was work," and to that I would say, "OK, but not in any context to the plane's ability to save you." You didn't build the plane, fly it, or put fuel in it. You getting on the plane didn't contribute one thing to what the plane is capable of or did; it just allowed you to experience it. Nobody in their right mind would step off the plane and praise themselves after being rescued in that manner! How could you possibly look at your decisions to get on the plane and think somehow your decision had anything to do with what the plane did! The pilot, the manufacturer, and the people who maintained the plane are the ones who deserve all the credit for saving you. All you had to do was agree to let them save you. And this is exactly what faith is.
6. Charles Hodge wrote, "**Faith, therefore, is ... the simple act of accepting, and not the ground on which salvation is bestowed.**"¹
7. John Stott wrote, "**'Grace' is God's free and undeserved mercy towards us, and 'faith' is the humble trust with which we receive it for ourselves.**"²
8. In its simplest, most basic form, **Faith is a belief that you are willing to submit your life and actions to.**
 - a. If I have faith in a bridge to get me across a river in better condition than trying to swim across it, then I will choose to walk across the bridge

¹ Hodge, C. (1858). *A commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians* (p. 118). Robert Carter and Brothers.

² Stott, J. R. W. (1979). *God's new society: the message of Ephesians* (p. 83). InterVarsity Press.

rather than swim. My faith doesn't make the bridge successful at holding me up; it just connects me to the experience the bridge's success offers.

- b. Because I have faith in Thrivent Financial to manage money well, I gave Lucas and Charles Beatty a significant portion of the money I've saved over the years to invest it for me. My faith has no impact on their ability to do what they do, whether positively or negatively; it only allows me to experience the results of their work because it's the reason I gave them part of my savings.
 - c. Likewise, my willingness to submit to God or trust God has no bearing on God's ability to do what He says He has done and will do, but it is a necessary component for me to experience. I must get on the plane, choose to walk on the bridge instead of swimming the river, or opt to give my money to Thrivent instead of a worm farm like Cousin Eddie! If I want to experience what God does, I must say yes to it, but the "it" ain't me; the "it" is all Him!
- G.** Now, some of you may be wondering why this is so important. To some, it may even sound like I'm splitting hairs. Some may be wondering why I am diving so deep into this one concept. The reason is that we constantly fear that we don't have enough faith to save us! The measure of our faith has ZERO impact on God's ability to do what HE DOES! Stop worrying that you don't have enough faith and start praising God that His work is enough!
- H.** God uses our weak and pathetic faith as the means by which He unleashes all the eternally gracious work of Christ for us!
- I.** HOWEVER, it is vital that we know that God's work of salvation includes empowering us to do His Work! Salvation is NOT salvation by our works nor is it salvation from doing works, but rather, salvation is so we can do LIVING works!

The second vital truth about how God has equipped us to do His Work is that,

(2) In saving us, God equipped us to ACCOMPLISH the works He made for us. (2:10)

- A. 10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.**
- B. 10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works,**

1. **“workmanship,’** The English word ‘poem’ comes from this Greek term (*zoiēma*). This word is only used two times in the NT, here and Rom. 1:20.”³
2. Paul speaks of what God has done in us and to us in saving us, using the imagery of a poet crafting a poem. A poem is literature of the heart, of passion, of beauty, and of a deeply personal and sincere effort. Who we are is a product of that kind of work being done by God! The salvation of God is not something that leaves us in a mess; it doesn’t leave us as dead men walking somewhere different, but rather as completely different people who can now do good works as defined by God!
3. When we were talking about this passage as a teaching team, Shorty (AKA Jason Gilbert, our really tall Student Pastor at Venture) said something that connected with me. I LOVE being outdoors, if for no other reason than to just stare at God’s creation. The glory of the craftsmanship and handiwork of God as seen in a sunrise or a sunset, in the view from the top of a mountain, in listening to and watching the ocean waves roll in, right down to just staring at the beautiful, delicate details of the late spring flower of Mountain Laurel are all things that calm my spirit and put fuel in my tank. I so value those moments because I’m so moved by the glory of God in what I see. But Gilbert pointed out that not even the grandest and most magnificent mountain compares with what God has done in saving us and making us His children! Nothing in the universe compares to the work of God that has crafted us into His children as only the Master craftsman can!
4. The craftsmanship, artistry, and poetry, to take totally rebellious vessels who were incapable of doing anything God actually designed us to do because we, by nature, would rather live in submission to the desires of our flesh and our own glory; we who by nature took everything God blessed us to be and do and twisted it up and destroyed it with our own selfish motivations, have now, by the intimate powerful hand of God, been personally made by Him to be something entirely different and new. We are now fully capable of good works, but not just any random good works as defined by mankind, but rather ones personally made by God for us to walk in! Paul writes,

C. which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

1. The works God made for us are very, very specific works, ones that he crafted and made for us to do that are worthy of His name being associated with!

³ Utley, R. J. (1997). [*Paul Bound, the Gospel Unbound: Letters from Prison \(Colossians, Ephesians and Philemon, then later, Philippians\)*](#): Vol. Volume 8 (p. 88). Bible Lessons International.

2. But, don't confuse Ephesians 2:10 with being about some kind of activity you do for the church, or what you can do with the unique talents God has given you. Those are important and indeed from God, but that's not what Paul is talking about here. The good works Paul is talking about here are the works EVERY saved person is called to walk in and do, that are utterly and completely the opposite of the works of this world! These are the works of light in a world of darkness! Jesus spoke of these works in the Sermon on the Mount when He said,
3. **13 "You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. 14 "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 5:13-16)**
4. What makes these good works work is because you have been made a light! When God saved us, He illuminated us to be lights, His lights, and as such, the very work we are doing as light is something that HE alone created and created for us to do.
5. As my father-in-law, Keith Zachary, puts it, "**Good works are God's works.**"
6. When the Bible speaks of good works, it's literally speaking of the works that God does, and that we can't do unless God equips us to do them, and that's exactly what God did when He saved us! Prior to being saved, all our works were a mess, but now that we have been saved, we have been made into people who get to do things that sin and death cannot destroy; that will be praised by God HIMSELF when He says, "Well done thou good and faithful servant!" As those who have been brought to life, we can live with confidence that, no matter how good or bad life gets, we can live with purpose and activity that is not in vain because the good works we now do have an eternal effect and purpose that only HIS people have been made to be able do! It's why Paul wrote,
7. **58 Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain. (1 Corinthians 15:58)**

In conclusion, let me read you an observation from William Barclay about this passage. He wrote,

“Good works can never earn salvation; but there is something radically wrong if salvation does not produce good actions.”⁴

Challenge: What are you saying YES to—God and the works He made for His people to do, or the works that testify of sin and Satan?

⁴ Barclay, W. (2002). [*The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians*](#) (p. 121). Westminster John Knox Press.