

Walking in Good Works

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Bible Text: Ephesians 2:10
Preached on: Sunday, January 22, 2017

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Ephesians 2 as we go back there again. The apostle is weaving now into his exhortation to the church at Ephesus some practical conclusions about the rich rich doctrines of grace that he's been layering one on top of the other and showing that now there is a practical side of this working out in our lives, and again that balance. There is a part of us that needs to be diligent and disciplined and committed to living out what Christianity is and not just sitting around glorying in that it's all of grace, it is but there is a part of us that has to be determined.

It was I don't know how many years ago it was when a man and I were at church, a good bit older than me, who said, "You know, it just helps to get up in the morning and have your quiet time and say, Lord, I'm not going to sin today. I am not going to give into this or this today. I'm doing it for you." And sure enough, I started praying that and thinking that way and do you know what? It makes a difference. There is something to you if you will, girding up the loins of your heart and mind and saying, "I'm going to serve God today." And maybe that's common for you all the time but sometimes we can just get into a rut and not just really actively think that way.

So we're going to talk about good works because as he gets to chapter 2, verse 10, I know we've already had one message from there but I'm going to pull another message out of that verse, he's going to talk about this very aspect of us walking in good works. "For we are His workmanship," beginning in verse 10, remember the original Greek says, "His workmanship we are." He has done all of this stuff and it is "created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them."

Now, let's talk, first of all, about the purpose of salvation. You know, we're not just saved from something, we're saved for something. Keep that balance in your mind. Definitely we are saved from something: we are saved from the wrath of God, we are saved from hopeless enslavement to the power of sin, we are saved from an eternity in the presence of sin. We are saved from some things that you want to be saved from but we are also saved for something. He said we were created in Christ Jesus for good works.

Now, when you were born of your mom, you were created in the first Adam, in that first Adam's likeness, a physical being, and then you are created again in Christ Jesus at your new birth. That's why Jesus said you must be born again. That's why the apostle wrote,

"If you're in Christ, you're a new creation." You were born of Adam when you were physically born through the womb of your mother, when you are born again through Jesus Christ, you become his offspring.

As a matter of fact, in chapter 1, verse 4, if you would look back there, I know we look back a lot but you have to because you need to get the flow of all that's been set before or you won't understand where you are and what the true meaning is. He says in verse 4 of chapter 1, "just as He chose us," the same concept as electing us, just as he chose or elected us "in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love." Then now we come to chapter 2, verse 10, we have been created for good works. So in chapter 1, verse 4, you're elected to be one who is holy and blameless, a standing of holy and blameless. In chapter 2, verse 10, you are created in Christ Jesus for good works. You are elected unto holiness, you are created in Christ Jesus for good works because I suppose God, well, I don't suppose, if he had wanted to, he could just have saved us in time and space history whenever he wanted to and just immediately taken us on to glory and we'd be there in the glorified state, but he doesn't do that. So he's got a purpose for leaving you down here. You've been born again to the end that you might begin bearing good works – now listen – after your new Father. After your new head, in accordance with your new lineage of Jesus Christ, not the old Adam who sinned in the garden of Eden. And although there is a point in time when you become that new creation, you become in the new Adam, the second Adam, Jesus, you become in a sense his offspring, yet what happens is the old Adam begins a slow death and the new Adam begins a slow maturity. Now, some things kind of happen quickly but that's the journey of sanctification and that's one of the reasons why we have to have each other and small groups are so important and church life and the blessings and encouragements and love and compassion one to another, including the challenges and the corrections and the accountabilities one to another, because we are slowly dying to the old Adam, that's what we were naturally, and we are slowly living unto the new Jesus Christ who is our new Father and we are of a new lineage in him. So born in Adam unto the works of Adam, but born into Jesus Christ unto the works of Jesus Christ. This is the purpose of salvation as far as leaving you here on the earth. Now, obviously you're probably going to immediately think, "No, wait a minute, we always continually emphasize the purpose is the glory of God." Of course it is but how is God glorified? By the change wrought out of your life through this new birth you have experienced. Created in Christ Jesus for good works.

Titus 2:14 is a good cross reference here, "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." You know pretty much my testimony. I wasn't raised in church and my home life was pretty agnostic. As a matter of fact, I was told by people in my home that there is no God. I was told that when you die it's just a dreamless sleep. So I was about as blank as you could get when I was first witnessed to and that night when I was driving my car back to college and I heard a preacher on the radio share the Gospel and I was gloriously born again. But it's interesting that as blank a slate as you could possibly have and live in the Bible Belt, I guess, but I didn't really know anything hardly at all, and immediately I began looking for a church after the night I was converted in my car

driving back to college. Is that not strange? Just immediately I thought you go to church. Now, I couldn't explain to you why. Of course I knew what a church was, I knew people went to church to serve God and it was just like I'm supposed to do that. So God is purified. Titus says God is purifying, well, Paul writing to Titus says God is purifying for himself a people zealous for good works. Now, think about some of you, the hundreds and thousands of times you've been to small groups or you've been to church or you've been to a prayer meeting. Why do you do all that stuff? Now, no doubt you can do that in the flesh. We know the Bible very clearly teaches unregenerate people can be very religious, but if you really know Christ, that's a good work God put into your life that he prepared beforehand that you would walk in those. It's a change. He wants to see something different out of us after he changes us through the work of his Son applied to our lives by the Holy Spirit.

Now, here's another good cross reference: 2 Corinthians 3:2-3. I just quoted this earlier in the service. "You are our letter, written in our hearts, known and read by all men." Paul says, "I want people to watch you. You're the church we have pastored and I want the Corinthian community to look at you and know you're our letter to the world. You are our statement of what God is and what he can do." Are you a good statement of me to the world if I were in Paul's shoes? And I guess I am in Paul's shoes. We don't have any apostles and I'm the only senior preaching pastor you have, so you are my letter. As I say to the community, "I've been called to preach God's word. I've been called to be an agent of Christ," as Paul would term us, "and an ambassador for Christ and if you want to know the effects of my message and my God in my ministry," not mine possessively but mine that the Lord has entrusted me with as a stewardship, "if you want to know the effects of that, look at my church." That's what Paul is saying. There ought to be the good works there that testify to the world that there has been a change in you. By the way, listen to your pastor: you're going to blow it at times. You're going to get in the flesh, you're going to function according to the emotions at times, you may get angry, you may get jealous, a sin issue may come up in your life, but do you know what the good work is there? People see you willing to humble yourself and repent and make it right. Sometimes in the workplace, that's more powerful than if you've got a pristine reputation.

I'll never forget my grandmother talking about my granddaddy. My granddaddy felt like he was converted when he was in his 40s but he ended up in the Church of Christ denomination but I always thought he didn't really fit it but that was just what he was around after he got converted. She told me, she said, "You know, sometimes we get in a fuss and sometimes he says something he shouldn't but he always comes back and says, 'Will you forgive me?'" That's one of the ways I believe he might have really known Christ. He couldn't bear the thought of carrying something he did wrong and not getting it right. That's part of the good works that we do.

Paul said, "You're our letter, known and read by all men; being manifested that you are a letter of Christ." So Paul says, "You're my letter, in a sense, but actually Christ working through my preaching and teaching. You're a letter of Christ showing the good works through your life, revealing Christ."

Now, he continues on. I'm in 2 Corinthians 3:2-3. You don't have to turn there, just keep listening. He said, "[You are] cared for by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts." The end of salvation is the glory of God and God saved us for the purpose of walking in good works so that our life would shine his light and his truth for his pleasure and for his glory.

Now, as we look at Ephesians 2:10 again, we think about that phrase that when he talks about our good works, he says these which were "prepared beforehand." The good works you're to live out were as much elected to be a part of your new life in Christ as your justification was a part of your election in Christ. You are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, but the faith that saves you never stays alone. There are good works.

Now, this ended my notes for here but let me throw this out at this point. I think I've challenged you here a number of times but repetition helps things stick. Be careful about measuring up moral stuff because, you see, a guy over here had a real problem with anger. He's like a man who used to go to our church years ago and he came from South Louisiana and he came from rough Cajun culture and he said, "Brother Jeff, I'm not exaggerating, every weekend we got together and certainly every holiday we got together with the wider family, and every time we drank, and every time the men got drunk, and every time we had fights." He said, "I mean fistfights. I mean rolling in the dirt. Just cussing and fighting." So coming out of that background, he could just fight once a month and be doing good. Are you with me? Now, some of us would look at that and think, "Well, he must not be saved. What kind of works is that?" Well, coming from where he's coming from, he is repenting and coming along. Now, you over here on the other side, you've got another predisposition that's difficult for you. I remember a man that got converted in our church years ago and he had a bad problem with alcohol and you remember back when we went wet and he said, "Now there's a beer joint or liquor store on every corner on my way home from work." That doesn't bother me but it was tough for him.

So what I'm saying is you've got to be real careful measuring, you know, don't get your top seven moral sense and every saved person never does these. It varies person to person. Paul writes to the Corinthians and what does he say to the Corinthians and really in a general sense the Greek churches? He would say, "Flee fornication. Fornicators will not inherit the kingdom of God." Paul, why are you on sexual sin so much? What's the big deal? Because the Corinthian culture and the Greek culture, it was immersed in sexual immoralities. The men of the culture would worship, their pagan idols are like we talked about in Amos this morning, they worship their pagan idols by visiting prostitutes down at the pagan temple. So it was immersed in their lifestyle and some of them had to struggle repenting out of it. Now, certainly there are some things that we ought to put, I guess, more pressure on than others. I'm not saying that you promote a man living in sexual immorality. I'm not saying that but it's understandable he'd have to deal with that more because they were immersed in that. So be careful counting up moral stuff. Yes, there should be progress there. Yes, there should be repentance there. Yes, we should hold each other accountable there. But one guy's area of struggle is not the other guy's

area of struggle so you be careful strutting your superiority just because you're not struggling in a couple of areas your brother is struggling in. There may be things in your heart and in your thinking that's worse than what he struggling with, just his is on the outside more. Can I get an amen there? Sometimes it's just a little more public.

I think I said this one time, I in no way, shape or fashion would ever encourage smoking but I've known a brother or two, a sister or two through the years who love Jesus, served in the church, loved others, gracious, kind Christians and they smoked some cigarettes every now and then. Just didn't want to, trying to get over it but I've known some people through the years, none of you, I promise you, none of you, that would have told you, "They don't need to be smoking them cigarettes." They've got tongues this long. And everything that happens they go, "Yakkety yakkety yak." By the way, can I just throw this in? Since Matt has already preached on social media and I haven't heard his sermon but I'm glad he did it – if you haven't heard it, even though I haven't heard it, you ought to listen to it because the standards of Christian conduct apply to social media too. By the way, if you sin and repent of it, just sin and repent of it, don't put it on social media. Just don't put it out there. We don't want to see it. We don't want to hear it. Amen? We don't know about it. Just don't do it. Don't videotape it and put it out. Just don't do it. There is a whole host of things we ought to be able to wrestle with and repent of without putting them everywhere. Amen? How did I get off on all of this?

My point is you've got to be a little careful with measuring up certain outward moral and obvious public sins because we come from different perspectives and we can be repenting there. Be patient with one another there. But we know that whatever works and whatever good works begin to grow in our life as we mature in Christ, these are grace gifts of God and they were prepared in God's grace to be applied in our lives before the foundation of the world. The infinite, omniscient, omnipotent God ordained and prepared the works we are to live out before the foundation of the world. I can't explain all of that, I can't wrap my mind around it but that's what the text says. That's why Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:10, "I am what I am by the grace of God." People might have looked at Paul and said, "You're a strong Christian, you're so bold and you're so committed and you're just so faithful." And he said, "Well, whatever good works are there, it's the grace of God." Charles Hodge, the Presbyterian theologian, said something real neat when he said it this way, he said, "Our good works are drawn up out of the treasury of God." I'm going to say that again, "Our good works are drawn up out of the treasury of God." God does save us by grace alone but when he has saved us, he deposits within us a new heart disposition toward God, toward self and toward holy living, and this starts producing new works. He gives us a new heart for good works and then he starts developing new habits of good works in our lives.

Once again, I'll go back to the simple thing of joining a true church and faithfully serving God there. That's not a little thing. That's a huge thing. As a matter of fact, Scripture bears out that that's really the foundational work and the foundational fruit of the true Christian because, you see, a pagan man who doesn't know God at all and could care less about Jesus Christ can reform his life morally. He can stop using dirty words. He can stop cheating on his wife. He can give up the bottle. A lot of unregenerate men have done that.

They can get morally clean but you can't cause that man to love God's true church unless God has changed his heart. Are you seeing what I'm saying? There's just something there. God puts that in the heart.

Now, the flesh attacks this new change in us, this new heart and new habit for good works. The antinomianism is on one side and then there is another extreme on the other side, Pelagianism. Antinomianism just basically says, "We're saved by grace and therefore no law, no moral standards, have any bearing on us whatsoever." Now, they kind of just like one of the false teachers of Paul's day would teach that the flesh is just evil anyway, nothing you can do with it, just let it go. Antinomianism would just say, "Let it go. You're under no moral law, no obligations." That is so very wrong. It's all grace and it's all of God but you cannot have that attitude and be biblical and right with God.

This is kind of the easy believism thing. How many times, this happened years ago more than it happens in this day, but I would go and witness to some man, sometimes it was an older gentleman, and I would try to share with him about Christ and he'll say, "I've done that," and then not directly but in the next phrase or two would basically say, "So leave me alone. I did that when I was seven." You know, he's 57, 67, hasn't been in church in years and, "Well, I did that." You did what? First of all, if you did it, it didn't do anything. And that's what they want to do, is just kind of live their life their way and check off their experience that they're okay with God. Now, Jude warned in Jude 4, this important phrase, "for certain persons have crept in unnoticed," or crept in unaware. You know what pastors always say there, they are creeps. They have crept into the church unnoticed. Now, it's not like you didn't notice them, you just didn't notice what they were. They came in looking really good. You think, "This guy right here, he's going to be a great new teacher. He's going to be a great leader. He's going to be a faithful blessing to our church." But he's really a creep. He doesn't know God and Satan put him in there.

That's what Jude is warning, "certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation." What does that mean? A false teacher sneaks into the church with ill motives and Jude says, "he was long beforehand marked out for such condemnation." "Pastor, what does that mean?" I can tell you what it means: it means he was long beforehand marked out for that condemnation. That's what it means. I can't make it mean anything else.

Then he goes on, Jude, Jude 4, "ungodly persons," now here it is, "who turn the grace of God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ." He says, "When you get out of balance in antinomianism and you say it's all of grace and you start soft pedaling and viewing your sins lightly, viewing your tongue misuse lightly, viewing your gossip lightly, doing your tearing down with your words lightly because, 'Well, God just forgives me anyway,' viewing your lust lightly, viewing your dishonesty lightly," whatever your sin may be, I may have left yours out, "because it's all grace, that's wrong. When you do that, you deny our Master, Jesus Christ." Yes, it's all grace. Yes, of course you can't lose your salvation. But that's not the attitude of a child of God. You were saved and God had prepared beforehand that you would walk in those good works.

Paul told the Romans in Romans 6:15, "What shall we say? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? May it never be!" Literally, "God forbid such a thought!" Right the opposite. One person reminded me, actually a Christian radio statement, it was a lady talking about a movie that was out and it was not a good movie to see and she said, "All things are lawful but not all things are profitable," quoted the Scripture. Yeah, it's all lawful in the sense there is nothing you can do to cause yourself to be under the judgment of law again, but is it profitable for the glory of God, your good, the good of your church, the good of your family and the good of anybody you are influencing? Of course not. A lot of things are not and so you look at it from the perspective, "I can't be an antinomian and just say it's all grace and none of this matters." It absolutely matters. We're to have standards and convictions and rules and conduct for our homes, our individual lives, our churches.

The other end is Pelagianism. The old Pelagian viewpoint was that works are required to receive saving grace. Now, Paul has smashed that viewpoint into oblivion in chapter 1, verse 1, down to chapter 2, verse 10. I mean, just totally annihilated the concept that your works open the door to God's saving grace. Paul points out in Ephesians 2:10, our verse for tonight, that the good works are a part and parcel of the new life we receive at regeneration. The only – listen – the only possible result of God's saving work is the bearing of fruit unto good works. In the Gospels, Jesus said we would be known by our fruit. Now, sometimes it may take a while like I was saying a while ago. Some things seem to just kind of disappear immediately and some things you will go to your grave with that besetting sin in your life and in the sovereignty of God, perhaps part of that is because God wants to keep reminding you of what you are without him, weak and pitiful. John 15:8, "bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples."

Well, there's a pattern. That's all the purpose of our salvation, now the pattern of the saved lifestyle. I won't be as long here. So he says there in verse 10 as we continue, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand," we've talked about all that and here's the next, "so that we would walk in them." We would walk in them. 2 Corinthians 9:8, "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." He has given you what you need to get through this.

I shared with this before. You know when you pastor people or preach to people for as long as I have preached to you, there is nothing new I can tell you, I've told you everything I know. I mean, there's nothing new I can tell you. If I don't tell you stuff I've already told you, I can't tell you anything else. But anyway, I was talking about depression some time ago and I found a little article on depression and, you know, the Bible commands you to think a certain way. Did you know that? You're to think on what's true, think on what's honorable and peaceable. You don't have the right to be the victim of your thinking. God has told you you have to make yourself think certain ways. Now, I struggle there at times. Can I get an amen there? Sometimes I listen to myself too much and don't talk to myself enough. And this guy wrote an article about depression and he talked about how we need to be careful with antidepressants and medicines. We don't

have a position of condemnation on that but I hate to see people left only to that. Man, utilize what God has for you. I know for a fact people who have had long dependency there. And if that's where you are, look, we love you. This is not condemnation but I've seen those same people employ biblical principles and get completely free from having to have it. Now, don't you throw them away. You talk to the doctor and work with him or her.

But he was talking in this article, he was a Christian counselor, a nouthetic counselor, and he was talking about depression and he said what happens is people get depressed or they have the floating anxiety and they get down and they will read one verse of Scripture, pray for 37 seconds and say, "Well, I don't feel any better." And here's what he said, are you listening? This is profound. It's just totally profound. He said, "Have you tried reading your Bible and praying all night? Have you tried locking yourself in a room, open the word of God and said, I'm going to memorize so much Scripture and get my thinking on something right as a gut wrenching, committed determination, I'm going to stay before God reading the word, memorizing it and praying?" Now look, pray thanksgivings to God. Make yourself. It doesn't matter if you feel like it. Do it. The Bible says with thankfulness in your heart to God. He said, "Have you tried that for 24 hours?" He said, "Try that for 24-hours and get back with me."

I've been in the ministry now for what, 40 years? I've never seen one person in all my counseling that diligently worked at thanksgiving who stayed depressed. Not one yet. I'm not saying they didn't have some dips and some struggles but I mean, every single person as an act of their will, if they start...well, who are you going to start? You start with thanking God. "God, I thank you that you're God. I thank you that you're holy." We could thank right there for all day because God says there so many wonderful things about God. Go down to the cross. Start making lists. I make them make a list, 25 things a day you're going to write out that you're going to be thankful for and you're going to discipline yourself to make yourself literally verbally thank God for those things. Now, so far, please don't be the one that proves me wrong here, all right? But so far nobody has ever stayed depressed. They may have had some more struggles, I'm not saying that.

I remember a lady one time, she was bad to think things, OCD which is idolatry and think on things, and she literally thought somebody was spying on her through her lightbulbs in her house. And I said, "Well, you've got to quit doing that." It's funny now, it wasn't funny then but it's funny now. I said, "You've just got to stop. Quit. Don't do it. That's not true. The Bible requires you to think on what's true and that's not true. Unless you can find a camera in that light, it is not true." And I said, "You've got to as an act of your will repent. Say, God, that's sin. I'm not allowed to think what I want to think or what I think I think is true, I'm to think on what is true and there are no cameras in these light fixtures in my house." And she prayed and she repented and said, "God, forgive me for letting myself think this way. I know that's not right. It's not true." And we raised our hands and she said, "I feel so much better." Is that not the simplest thing in the world?

Well, that is a part of the works we are to do as Christians, work on our thinking. Work on thinking true things. How much better we would be and sometimes you have to have

somebody to lovingly work with you in these areas. Saint Augustine said, "Before we were not able to not sin, now we are able to not sin." Did you hear that? "Before we were not able to not sin, now we are able to not sin."

I've got four quick areas and I'm going to close, four areas of the pattern of our good works, very obvious things. First of all, in your heart, in your thinking, we just talked a whole lot about that, you become a repenter in your heart, you become humble in your heart. You catch attitudes and dispositions, thought patterns that are disobedient to God and you call it what it is, confess it as sin, repent of it and strive to be a repenter in your thinking.

In your home, not only your heart but your home. You know, that's where a whole lot of us, you know, and I preached on the assignments, the family assignments not long ago. Some of you men need to be very intentional about good works in the area of your assignment as a husband, as a father. Some of you ladies and, ladies, you have my sympathies because your role is the one that is so blasted by the world and even the church tries to discourage you; some of you ladies need to be very intentional about the good works of being the wife and the mother and the homemaker God has called you to be.

Children, young people, you need to be very intentional to be the kind of students and young person God tells you to be, to honor your father and mother. Just get up in the morning, have your quiet time and say, "I'm honoring my mother and father today. I'm not letting my flesh have its way. I'm not going to do it. I belong to Christ." And you may blow it but you won't blow it as much if you do that than if you don't get up in the morning ready to attack it.

Your heart, your home life, a third area would be the world as we go out into the world. Avoid going to wrong places. Avoid going to the wrong places. You know, Solomon said to his son in Proverbs, "Don't go near her door." Did you hear? "Don't go near her door." You know where her door is. You just don't go there. Three places in the New Testament, three places the New Testament commands us: don't go to drinking parties. Don't go to drinking parties. There is an amazing amount of bad things that happen to people at drinking parties. I'm not talking about if you have a business deal and you've got a client and he orders a drink. I'm talking about going to places where the intent to go there is to party and drink and have a good time. The Bible says just don't do it. Determine, "I'm not going to go to those places in the world."

As you are going in the world, avoid wrong people. There are some people the Bible says you're not to have intimate relationships with. You've got to work with some people, we've got to buy and do commerce with people that are wicked. The Bible knows that. I'm talking about the people you choose to develop close bonds with, maybe a guy you choose to go into business with, even sometimes that can be acceptable. I'm not being a legalist here but the people you run with, the people you get to know, don't get with the wrong people. Don't go to the wrong places.

As you go out into the world, learn to love your enemies. These are the kind of good works we should do. Purpose to be ready to give an account for anyone who asks of you, be a witness, that is, for Christ.

Then finally, the church, and of course the church. Based on biblical authority, a man can struggle a lot of places, a woman can struggle in a lot of places but if they struggle with loving and serving God in a good church, that biblically speaking casts more doubt on the authenticity of their faith than anything else. Serve God in your local church. Be active in your small group. Be committed to serve in your small group. Be a servant to others in there. Cultivate the discipline of listening. Make listening to the word of God a disciplined work, not just a lazy pastime. Give generously to God's work through your church. Be committed to preserve the unity of God's church. And endure persecution rather than deny the faith and deny your membership and standing with the church. Just try to serve the Lord and please the Lord.

Well, these are the kind of things that we should expect to be in and growing in our lives because "we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them." Why don't you just try it in the morning, get up and say, "I'm going to serve the Lord today. I'm serving the Lord today. I'm not giving into this thing or that thing. I'm going to serve the Lord today." And course, you're not saying you're doing it in your strength, you do it in his strength through you but God's Spirit in you works with your determination. I don't know how that works out in the sovereignty of God but I know he expects us to be that way. Amen.

Let's stand together in prayer.