

Series: *Colossians – Christ Above All*

Title: "Are 57% of Evangelicals Wrong About Salvation?" (Colossians 1:10)

Speaker: Rev. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 8/2/2009

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Introduction

At this point in our study of the book of Colossians, we're looking at chapter one and verse ten. Once again, let me read that verse in context for you, beginning at verse nine:

- 9. For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding;**
- 10. that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;**
- 11. strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy;**
- 12. giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light.**

In previous messages we've seen that there are six key characteristics of a walk that is worthy of the Lord. In our last message we considered characteristic number one, which we find in the middle of verse ten. A walk that is worthy of the Lord means, Paul says, "fully pleasing Him." It means pursuing the goal of pleasing the Lord in everything you do, in all areas of your life. And we looked at a number of Scriptures that focus on that point.

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Today, we're going to focus on the second characteristic of a walk that is worthy of being identified with the Lord Jesus Christ. Characteristic number two is this: Walking worthy of the Lord means continually bearing the right kind of fruit. We find this also in verse ten: "That you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work..."

A more accurate translation of this part of verse ten would be: "in every work which is good, constantly bearing fruit and increasing in bearing fruit, by means of the thorough and accurate knowledge of God."

Christ is the Root, Good Works are the Fruit

I want us to focus in on that phrase, "every work which is good" – or, "every good work."

The first question that comes to mind is this: What constitutes "good works"? What is the definition of "good works"? Well, as we look at Scripture we find that the word that is translated "good" means that which is by its nature pleasing (that is, pleasing to God), that which is upright and honorable.

So practically speaking, how do we know what constitutes "good works"? Verses nine and ten tell us that we know what constitutes "good works" by understanding God's will. And that knowledge comes by increasing our knowledge of God, by reading and studying His Word.

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And there is something very important that every Christian needs to remember about good works: Christ is the root, good works are the fruit. That is the proper order. Christians aren't Christians because of their good works. Christians are Christians because they believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. That's the order. Christ comes first – the preeminent Christ. He takes up residence in the heart of the believer, and good works result. We read of this in Ephesians chapter two, verses eight through ten: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them."

Christians are able to be fruitful in good works, bringing forth fruit that is pleasing to God, because of our position in Christ. That's what Paul tells the Colossian believers. Look back just a few verses to Colossians chapter one, beginning at verse four. It's because of "your faith in Christ Jesus and...your [resulting] love for all the saints; because of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel, which has come to you, as it has also in all the world, and is bringing forth fruit, as it is also among you since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth."

The Purposes of Good Works

Christ is the root, good works are the fruit. What, then, is the purpose of good works? Well, we've seen this a moment ago in Ephesians chapter two. Our good

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works are part of God's eternal plan. Ephesians chapter five, verse two tells us that our walk in Christ, our good works in Christ, are the sweet-smelling aroma of a sacrificial love-offering to God. It's the same thought that we saw last time in the beginning of Romans chapter twelve, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."

Good works are our witness to the unsaved. The fruit of which Paul speaks here is not the saving of souls as such, but rather it is our *witness* to unsaved souls, which God the Holy Spirit uses as one of the means by which He brings lost souls to faith in Christ. Matthew 5:16 – "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." 1 Peter 2:11-12 – "Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles [that is, among the unsaved], that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation [that is, when God brings any of them to faith in Christ because of your witness]."

Good works are also our ministry and our example to our fellow believers. Titus chapter two, verse seven: "In all things showing yourself to be a pattern of good works; in doctrine showing integrity, reverence, incorruptibility." Titus chapter

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three, verse fourteen: "And let our people also learn to maintain good works, to meet urgent needs, that they may not be unfruitful."

Good works are our foreordained, God-given responsibility. Once again, Ephesians chapter two, verse ten: "For we (believers) are His (God's) workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." Titus chapter two, verse fourteen: "[Christ] gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works."

Now that is the proper nature of good works. Salvation in Christ is the root, good works are the fruit, and our good works are part of God's plan of witness to the lost, and of example and a means of blessing to others, especially our fellow believers.

False Teachings About Good Works

And now that we've considered the Biblical view of good works, we also need to consider some false teachings about good works. There are two opposite but equally deadly errors about good works. We find them throughout the history of the church, and we find both of these errors to be very much alive today. False teaching number one says that since our salvation is all of grace, good works don't matter in the Christian life. False teaching number two says that good works save us, or contribute to our salvation. These are two opposite false teachings – one

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says works don't matter because you're *already* saved, and the other says that works do matter because that's *how* you *are* saved.

These false teachings come in many forms. And this is a serious problem in the Evangelical church today. According to recent surveys, 57% of Evangelical church members believe that good works are necessary in order to be saved, in addition to believing on Jesus Christ.

And you know, that is exactly what the Roman Catholic church teaches. The Roman Catholic church teaches that you *must* have good works in addition to the righteousness of Christ. And you even need the good works of saints and other people to help get you out of purgatory – what the Roman Catholic church calls the treasury of merit. The Roman Catholic system talks about grace, but grace as the Roman Catholic church defines it is really based on works. It's not grace at all. Dear friend, *none* of the Roman Catholic teaching about salvation has *any* basis in the Bible. It is a lie. It is based on the traditions of sinful men, and not on Scripture.

There are people in certain Reformed churches today who are saying something similar to the Roman Catholic teaching. They're saying that you're justified by faith when you first believe, but you're justified by your works in addition to faith at the last judgment. This is a heresy that goes by various names such as Shepherdism, the Federal Vision, the New Perspective on Paul, and Future Grace. All of these are false teachings, according to the Bible.

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And then there are other people – and you hear a lot of this in liberal churches – there are people who believe that when you stand before God, He weighs the good you've done and bad you've done, and if the good outweighs the bad He'll let you into Heaven. You'll hear people say, "My religion is the Sermon on the Mount." And when they say that, they're usually thinking of the Beatitudes – "blessed are the poor in spirit" – "blessed are the peacemakers" – and so on.

But what these people don't understand is that in the Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew chapter five, Jesus also said that if you even *think* about committing murder, you've committed murder. If you even *think* about committing adultery, you've committed adultery. The problem is not merely what you do, it's the condition of your heart.

Listen to me carefully. This is what the Bible teaches: We are not sinners because we sin. We sin because we are sinners. We sin because we have a sin nature that has been passed down to the entire human race through Adam.

And that sin nature has to be dealt with. The only way it could be dealt with was through the shedding of the blood of a perfect substitute, the Lord Jesus Christ. As we read in Hebrews 9:22, "without the shedding of blood there is no remission" of sin – no release from the bondage of the sin nature, no forgiveness for sins committed.

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Salvation is All of Grace

God's Word tells us that when you are saved, God graciously declares you, a guilty sinner, to be righteous. He declares you "not guilty" before His judgment bar. Now how does God do that, since Scripture tells us that God's standard is perfect holiness, and nothing less than that can save us? The answer is that God declares us not guilty, not on the basis of our own good works, our own righteousness, but on the basis of the merits of Jesus Christ alone. That's how we are justified before God. Jesus lived the perfect life that we cannot live, and He died the perfect atoning death that we cannot die, because that death required a perfect, sinless substitute for sinful men.

And, Scripture declares that faith, and faith alone, is the instrument of the believer's justification. This faith is absolutely naked faith – it is empty-handed belief in the person and work of Christ to save sinners. And as we saw in Ephesians two, that faith itself is the gift of God, it has nothing to do with works, so that no one can boast that he added even the slightest little spec to the righteousness of Christ.

In justification by faith, a great legal exchange takes place. The sins of the sinner are imputed to Jesus Christ, who has made full and final atonement for them. At the same time, the perfect all-sufficient righteousness of Christ is imputed to the undeserving, hopeless sinner. The believing sinner now wears the robe of Christ's righteousness, and the sinner need not – and indeed cannot – add

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any garment of his own righteousness. To attempt to do so would be to deny the sufficiency of Christ.

No Such Thing as “Easy Believism”

Salvation is all of grace. That is entirely true. But let’s also be clear about something else. Scripture does not teach “easy believism.” This is the false teaching that a person can profess a “faith” in Christ that is really only a formula of words, and that you can live as you please while you wait to go home to Heaven. The Bible knows nothing of this. Scripture knows nothing of “easy believism.”

And that is not because genuine faith involves works. Ephesians 2:8 and 9, Titus 3:5 and 6 – which tells us that it is not by works of righteousness which we have done, but by God’s mercy that He saves us – and many other passages, make it clear that this is not the case. Genuine saving faith is God-given faith. It is impossible for the natural man to believe the Gospel. Belief is not a mere formula of words that originates in the sinful heart of man by his own will. The one who truly believes is God’s workmanship from beginning to end. The believer has been created in Christ Jesus before the foundation of the world to do good works – the works which God prepared beforehand for him to do *after* he has been justified by faith alone. If a sinner has truly believed – if a sinner has exercised God-given faith in Christ and not a counterfeit – then a changed life will follow that profession of faith in Christ just as surely as day follows night.

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And that is because the believer's life is by definition a changed life – it is new life in Christ. That changed life is what the Bible calls sanctification – the work of God the indwelling Holy Spirit making the believer think and act and speak more and more like Jesus Christ. But those good works, the evidences of sanctification in the believer's life – those good works do not justify the believer in the sight of God. Good works are the result, not the cause, of salvation. Christ is the root of our salvation, good works are the fruit.

Works at the Judgment

The Bible bears this out when it talks about the coming judgment. We read of this in *Matthew 7:21-23* and *25:31-36*. When the Day of Judgment comes, the very first thing the Lord Jesus Christ will do is to place His sheep on His right hand. The sheep are already the sheep, and always have been. Their status is already known. They are already justified. They await no further evaluation in order to inherit the kingdom of God. They are invited without question to inherit the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world.

On that day the wicked will plead their good works as justification before the Lord, but to no avail. On the Last Day, those who plead their good works under the law will be among those whom the Lord condemns as lawless. He will say to them, *Matthew chapter seven and verse twenty-three*, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness." And we also see that at the Judgment, those who are justified in Christ will continue to reiterate their failings. They will

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continue to say with Paul (as we read in Philippians chapter three and verse nine), "I do not have a righteousness of my own." That is our position, both when we are saved and when we stand before Christ at the judgment. Believers come to Christ empty-handed at our conversion; and we will stand before Him empty-handed at the Judgment.

Dear friend, if you are a believer on the Lord Jesus Christ, on that day you will rest completely in the righteousness of Christ. And thus, John says in First John chapter two, verse seventeen, those who truly believe "may have boldness in the day of judgment."

Are Good Works Evident in Your Life?

And if you are a believer on the Lord Jesus Christ today, if that is your claim, does your life bear it out? Are you living out the works of the flesh, or the works of the Spirit? That is a serious question that every believer needs to ask. And you'll find the answer by looking into the Word of God. Galatians chapter five, beginning at verse sixteen, Paul says this:

"Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

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“Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.”

Dear friend, if you are a believer today, my prayer for you is that you will increase in the knowledge of God’s will, so that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, “being fruitful in every good work,” in gratitude for what Christ has done by grace alone, in saving you from your sins.