

Mod 10 — SAVED BY GRACE, FOR GOOD WORKS

by [Jack Cottrell](#)

I like to summarize salvation, using Eph. 2:8-10 and Col. 2:12, thus: we are saved BY GRACE, THROUGH FAITH, IN BAPTISM, FOR GOOD WORKS. Here we are examining the last phrase, “for good works” (Eph. 2:10). Good works are simply our everyday obedience to God’s law, i.e., being holy as God is holy, obeying our law code, living the Christian life, being good.

How do works (being good) fit into the salvation picture? Outside Christianity, and even for many within it, the general view is that we are saved BY works. (Paul wrote Romans 1-5 to combat this view.) On the other hand, many within Christendom have gone to the other extreme and have concluded that, since we are justified by faith, we don’t need to do good works. Thus we are saved FROM works. (Paul wrote Romans 6 to combat this view.)

The Biblical view is different from both of these extremes. As Eph. 2:10 says, we have been saved FOR good works. Understanding the difference between BY WORKS and FOR WORKS can make all the difference in the world for the Christian’s life and hope. Being justified by faith does not do away with works, but it causes us to see them in a totally new way. It enables us to say the following three things about works.

ONE: The word of LIBERATION: “I CAN do good works – because of *grace*.”

Until a person is saved, he or she cannot do good works. The second part of the “double curse” is that sin corrupts our hearts with spiritual sickness, even spiritual death (Jer. 17:9; Eph. 2:1, 5). This applies not necessarily to external obedience, but to the states of our hearts: attitudes, motives, goals.

But grace changes this. As our “double cure,” it not only resolves our legal problem of guilt and punishment, but also gives us a new nature that is in the process of being healed from sin-sickness. We have been given a new heart and a new spirit (Ezek. 36:26); we are new creatures (2 Cor. 5:17); “we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works” (Eph. 2:10). “His workmanship” is the work of regeneration and sanctification, accomplished mainly through the indwelling Holy Spirit.

It is because of the Spirit’s work within us that we CAN obey! It is “by the Spirit” that we put sin to death in our bodies (Rom. 8:13). God strengthens us with power through his Spirit working within our souls (Eph. 3:16). We work out the sanctification part of our salvation through God the Spirit, who is at work within us, helping us both to want to do good and to actually do it (Phil. 2:12-13).

Why do so many Christians still have trouble with sin? Because they have not yet learned how to use the power of the Holy Spirit in their lives! This is a tragedy, like Clark Kent living his whole

life without knowing he was Superman! Don't be like that: say, "I CAN DO GOOD WORKS, because God's grace is working in me!"

TWO: The word of OBLIGATION: "I OUGHT to do good works – because of *creation*."

Some think grace means that God's commands are no longer binding on us, and that we do not really HAVE TO obey his law! After all, we are not under law, but under grace! Doesn't Paul say that in Romans 6:14-15? Well, yes, but that is a *serious* misunderstanding of that text. Paul goes on to show in the verses that follow that even as Christians we are *slaves* to God and are therefore 100% obligated to obey every commandment of the law code that applies to us in this NT age.

Paul does not go into it here in Romans 6, but the ultimate basis for this obligation is the fact of creation. Everything—including us as persons—is God's possession because he is the Creator (Psalm 24:1-2). We owe God the debt of obedience just because he is the Creator. Grace does not change this.

So what does Rom. 6:14-15 mean? It means we are not under the LAW SYSTEM as a WAY OF SALVATION. We are free from the requirement of perfect obedience as a way of getting to heaven. We are NOT, however, free from our law code as a WAY OF LIFE, as a binding code of conduct. We are still absolutely obligated to obey all of God's commands that regulate our everyday life. Freedom from law is NOT freedom from obedience. Is this legalism? NO! As Edward Fudge has said, legalism is law-DEPENDING (depending on your obedience to save you). But we are talking about law-KEEPING, which simply means *holiness*. Jesus is not only our Savior; he is also our Lord.

So – "Do I HAVE to be good?" YES! "But do I have to be good as a way of getting into heaven?" NO! "So why should I care about being good?" First, because it's the right thing to do, totally apart from any consideration of heaven or hell. But there is much more than this; there is another word that we must say about good works:

THREE: The word of MOTIVATION: "I WILL do good works—because of *love*."

"OK, I *can* do good works. And OK, I *ought* to do good works. But *will* I?" Of course you will! How could you not? You are a Christian! You believe in Jesus! And FAITH WORKS (Gal. 5:6); that is its very nature. In fact, true faith not only works—it works HARD! It toils and labors.

Like English, Greek has two words for "work." One is ordinary work (*ergon*; verb *ergazomai*); the other is LABOR (*kopos*; *kopiaō*). Both words are used for the Christian life; see 1 Cor. 15:58, which says we abound in the WORK of the Lord, since our LABOR is not in vain in him. Yes, we are willing to labor and toil for our Lord. As the old hymn "To the Work" says, "Toiling on, toiling on! Toiling on, toiling on! Let us hope, let us watch, and labor till the Master comes!"

But the question here is, what motivates the Christian to work so hard at fighting sin and being good? Those who think only in terms of law will say, we work in order to escape hell and go to heaven. OK, maybe we used to think that way, *but grace changes this motivation*. Remember:

salvation by grace is a free gift (Rom. 6:23; Eph. 2:8-9), and we cannot work for a gift (Rom. 4:4). Also, there is no hell for those who are in Jesus (Rom. 8:1). So why DO we labor for our Lord? BECAUSE OF LOVE—grateful love. Jesus says if we love him, we will keep his commands (John 14:15). Paul affirms that faith works through love (Gal. 5:6); our Christian life is a “labor of love” (1 Thess. 1:3). See 1 John 4:18-19: the more we love, the less we work out of fear.

Grace does not change our obligation (why we OUGHT to obey), but it changes our motivation (why we DO obey). We obey not in order TO BE saved, but because we ARE saved. We are saved not BY works, but FOR works. Obedience is not a “got to” thing; it is a “get to” thing. Our good works are not sin offerings; they are thank offerings. “Jesus paid it ALL”—not just a down-payment. “All to him I owe”—as a debt of gratitude.

Many preachers think that if they do not tie works to salvation, Christians will neglect their moral responsibilities and church duties. But we need to remember that there is no stronger motive than love. A parent will risk all and enter a burning building to save a child. A bride will work hard to look her loveliest for her groom. When you love someone, you cannot do enough for that person; that is the very essence of *agapē*. The other side of that coin is that you would rather do anything in the world than to hurt the one you love. And we need to remember: sin is a wound in the heart of God. Love and sin do not mix. We need to teach our people how to love God.

We also need to remember that we are justified by the blood of Christ; this means that our sins and imperfections are covered by his blood (Rom. 3:28; 4:6-8). We trust his atoning death to get us into heaven, not the record of our works. Let us stop focusing on and worrying about whether we are forgiven (which we are), and concentrate on our sanctification. Let us concentrate on pleasing God through good works, on striving to be holy as God is holy—because we LOVE GOD.

It boils down to this: good works are the result, not the cause, of our salvation. And: God does not save us because we are good, but we are good because God is saving us.