

Ephesians 2:4 But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6 and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast. 10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”

James 2:19 “You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe--and tremble! 20 But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? 21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? 22 Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? 23 And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." And he was called the friend of God. 24 You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only. 25 Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way? 26 For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.”

The Vanity of Man’s Pride

As we come to the conclusion of the Apostle’s grand summary of the Gospel in this very long sentence that begins chapter two, we come to what I will argue is the lynch pin of this important Epistle in verses 8-10!

➤ **Here we see the grand plan of salvation in what God has done and what God plans for us to do!**

8 “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast. 10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”

Up to this point we have considered what God has done to make us new creatures in Christ with about thirty sermons... As we study the rest of Ephesians, we will have many more sermons to consider the works prepared for us to walk in as those new creatures. It is a pattern that we see in almost all of the Apostle Paul’s Epistles and Letters: Right doctrine & right life!

So the question that I had to face here was whether I should give many sermons on these grand truths which it would be very easy to do because quite honestly they have had a tremendous impact on my own life! While that is tempting, I should note that we have already often pointed forward to this summary in the sermons leading up to this point and yes we will often look back at them as we move through the very practical applications that Paul challenges us with for the rest of the Epistle.

➤ **In these pivotal verses we see faith and works & with both we must be so careful to keep them in the context of God’s grace & not fall prey to our own pride.**

We see faith in verse 8: “8 “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God...”

Remember that Grace here is unmerited favor and all should agree that such Grace is a gift from God!

- We also know that faith is the instrument that God uses to bring one to Christ and the question is whether it is something in us or also a gift from God!

In other words, does Paul reference to God's gift refer to us being saved or to the instrument of faith? Now the Apostle's entire focus up to this point has been on the Grace of God, so I think the emphasis here is on Grace, so what are we to do with faith?

- As we have considered in previous messages, we must be careful to not elevate faith to some work that we do to earn our salvation.
- We must remember that this faith is also part of the gift of Grace because it is God Who gives us the new hearts that can exercise faith and receive Jesus!

God proclaimed this clearly to the Prophet Ezekiel when He says, Ezekiel 36:26 "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them."

Now there should be no controversy here, but sadly it can often be the last gasp of human pride, what I am calling the vanity of pride, when some insist that our choice, our faith must play a significant role in salvation. Our choices and our faith are important, but they must always be seen in the full context of God's Grace which includes our new hearts!

There is an important Book given to us in the Old Testament which clearly exposes the pride of man... I would like to give you some homework to flesh this out a bit:

- Do you know what Book I have in mind?

As you study this important book it is important to remember how it begins and ends: Ecclesiastes 1:1 "The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem. 2 "Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher; "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." 3 What profit has a man from all his labor In which he toils under the sun?"

And then in the final verses we read: 13 "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, For this is man's all. 14 For God will bring every work into judgment, Including every secret thing, Whether good or evil."

- The whole point of Ecclesiastes is to show that all is vanity, or vapor without God: What King Solomon refers to as life under the sun.

King Solomon shows the vanity of many things that can have great worth and purpose when they are seen properly under God: Wisdom -- Pleasure -- Labor -- Wealth -- Honor

The same is true of faith: It is saving faith when it is under God and it is vanity when we think it something that we give to God or exercise in our own strength without a new heart!

Now I bring this up at this point and encourage you to study Ecclesiastes because it is perhaps one of the most misquoted books in all of the Bible.

Many seem to miss the introduction!

Ecclesiastes 1:13: "13 And I set my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all that is done under heaven; this burdensome task God has given to the sons of man, by which they may be exercised."

[mention turn turn turn.]

Ecclesiastes 7:29 “Truly, this only I have found: That God made man upright ”

Ecclesiastes 8:1 “Who is like a wise man?”

So, while it is true that man, even fallen man, is made in the image of God, we must remember that under the sun, without God, anything and everything that man can do or think is vanity and that includes our faith.

Next here in Ephesians we come to verse ten, “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”

- **So along with faith we must also consider works, and the same principle applies that we learn from Ecclesiastes!**

Sadly today, there is so much controversy in some reformed circles that you can get in trouble just using the words ‘faith’ and ‘works’ in the same sentence! But since the Apostle does so here, I think it is OK!

To me these controversies are not much different from the battles that raged in evangelical circles thirty and forty years ago when the debate was whether you could have Jesus as your Savior and not as your Lord. Back then many insisted that IF you said someone must bow the knee to Jesus as Lord, IF they were truly saved, you were adding works to salvation by grace!

Today in some reformed circles, if you say that those who have faith will obey Jesus, doing the good works they were created to do, then you are denying the great reformation doctrine of salvation by faith alone. I believe the confusion is similar to what we just discussed with regard to faith.

- **The gracious gift of salvation is the result of God’s love & actions from start to finish!**

If you want or need more homework, the very first series that I preached here at Church of the King was on the Book of James, which is why I included a portion of James as part of our text this morning. There we again see the proper relationship of faith and works and you can review that series for all the details

At chapter 2 & verse 14 James asks a very simple question: “What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?”

James goes on to give a very simple and direct answer in the verse 26:

“For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also”

In getting to that conclusion, James states that those who do not show works have an empty faith, and he compares them to the demons!

“You believe there is one God. You do well” [the doctrine is right] BUT James adds: “Even the demons believe and tremble” A “decision” for Christ or the “right theology” is NOT enough.

Sometimes those who cling to a decision card or statement of faith do not even bother to tremble!

The Evangelical conflict over having Jesus as Savior or as Lord was a false dichotomy: You must have Jesus as Savior AND Lord!

- **And as reformers we must be unafraid to affirm that saving faith is an obedient faith that walks in the good works we were created in Christ Jesus to walk in!**

It is also important to point out that this does NOT conflict with the great reformation revival of the Biblical doctrine of justification by faith:

In my serious on James, I reviewed a few Heidelberg questions & answers to demonstrate this truth and it is always a good place to return to...

After teaching about salvation by faith we find this at Question 64 . But doth not this doctrine make men careless and profane?

Answer . By no means: for it is impossible that those, who are implanted into Christ by a true faith, should not bring forth fruits of thankfulness.

Question 86 . Since then we are delivered from our misery, merely of grace, through Christ, without any merit of ours, why must we still do good works?

Answer . Because Christ, having redeemed and delivered us by his blood, also renews us by his Holy Spirit, after his own image; that so we may testify, by the whole of our conduct, our gratitude to God for his blessings, and that he may be praised by us; also, that every one may be assured in himself of his faith, by the fruits thereof; and that, by our godly conversation, others may be gained to Christ.

Question 88 . Of how many parts doth the true conversion of man consist? [*answering the modern question: How can I know I am saved?*]

Answer . Of two parts; of the mortification of the old, and the quickening of the new man.

Question 89 . What is the mortification of the old man?

Answer . It is a sincere sorrow of heart, that we have provoked God by our sins; and more and more to hate and flee from them.

Question 90 . What is the quickening of the new man?

Answer . It is a sincere joy of heart in God, through Christ, and with love and delight to live according to the will of God in all good works.

Question 91 . But what are good works?

Answer . Only those which proceed from a true faith, are performed according to the law of God, and to his glory; and not such as are founded on our imaginations, or the institutions of men.

➤ We see that the reformers had no problem putting faith and works in the same sentence!

The bottom-line: We are saved by Grace through faith, then empowered by the Holy Spirit!

After giving the example of Abraham and Rahab [mention Table], we come to the conclusion of James's thought which brings us right back to Ephesians:

Verse 26: "For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also."

James gives a clear answer to the question he raised in verse 14:

➤ Faith without works is dead!

Some today, are not comfortable with his straightforward answer.

We must not allow our modern dualisms, rationalisms or pietism to confuse what James says here: Absent breath, the body is dead & absent works, your faith is dead.

[discuss how we might be tempted to see that the other way around]

And so I trust you can see why we should see and should keep these verses as the lynch pin of this Epistle:

- **Knowing that we are saved by Grace through faith so that we are God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus unto good works that God planned for us to walk in!**

Let me conclude with an admonition and some encouragement from Pastor Lloyd Jones:

"It is here [studying these profound verses that] we see how our ideas of what the Christian is, fall hopelessly short of the biblical teaching. A Christian is a new creation.

He is not just a good man, or a man who has been improved somewhat; he is a new man, 'created in Christ Jesus'. He has been put into Christ, and the life of Christ has come into him, 'We are partakers of the divine nature! What is a Christian? A good man, a moral man, a man who believes certain things? Yes, but infinitely more! He is a new man, the life of God has come into his soul – 'created in Christ;, 'God's workmanship!' Have you realized that that is what makes you a Christian? It is not attending a place of worship. It is doing certain duties. These things are all excellent, but they can never make us Christians. [They could make us Pharisees!]

It is God who makes Christians and He does it in this way. He created everything out of nothing at the beginning, and He comes to a man and He makes him anew and gives him a new nature, make a new man of him. A Christian is 'a new creation', nothing less."

Communion Meditation:

Christ has prepared His feast for us this morning:

The example of Abraham and Rahab are used by James and again in Hebrews to teach us that the good news of the "new covenant in my blood" really is universal and that God's gracious gift of faith in Christ can be celebrated at the Table by everyone:

Male & female

Jew & Gentile

Rich & Poor

Free & slave

"righteous" & "sinful"

Mature & novice

Old & young