

BECOMING A PEOPLE OF GRACE

STUDY SEVEN

God's Artwork on Display

Ephesians 2:8–10

*Works-based theology has this equation: faith plus works equals salvation.
Grace-based theology teaches this: faith equals salvation followed by works.*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

IN the previous study, we dug for treasures in Ephesians 2:1–9 and uncovered some gems! Paul answered four crucial questions about how we relate to God:

- *What was it like before Christ?* Answer: We were dead in our sins and powerless to change our condition (Ephesians 2:1–3).
- *What did God do for us?* Answer: God united us with Christ spiritually. He raised us from the dead along with Christ and seated us with Christ in the heavenlies, securing our relationship with God for eternity (2:4–6).
- *Why did God do this for us?* Answer: Because God is gracious and merciful. It is God's nature to express kindness toward those He loves, and in the ages to come, we will be eternal showpieces of our Father's grace (2:7).
- *How can we receive new life?* Answer: Salvation is a gift we accept by faith in Christ our Savior, without working for it or trying to earn it with good behavior (2:8–9).

Together, these answers form the essential elements of the gospel—the good news about Jesus. But Paul isn't finished! In this study, we'll discover the answer to a fifth question: *For what purpose did God save us?* Or, put another way: *What difference does our salvation make in our lives?*



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

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Ephesians 2:8–10

God didn't save us to set us on a shelf. Rather, He has a purpose for us to fulfill as His redeemed people. But what is it? The answer reveals a gleaming truth that may surprise us. It's about God's creative work in forming who we are and equipping us for a unique plan that God determined before we were born. It's another marvelous truth to behold, a lovely gem that we will treasure forever.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

A thousand years before Paul, David penned these lines about God's creative work as He formed our bodies in our mother's womb.

*You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body
and knit me together in my mother's womb.
Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex!
Your workmanship is marvelous—how well I know it.
You watched me as I was being formed in utter seclusion,
as I was woven together in the dark of the womb.
You saw me before I was born.
Every day of my life was recorded in your book.
Every moment was laid out
before a single day had passed. (Psalm 139:13–16)*

Take a few moments to meditate on these verses and thank God for His workmanship in you. Then ask Him to reveal His ongoing work in your life and, specifically, the path He charted for you before you were born.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Perhaps Paul was reflecting on David's psalm when he wrote about God's spiritual handiwork in our souls:

*For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things
he planned for us long ago. (Ephesians 2:10)*

Brief but exceedingly profound, this verse contains the answer to the question, "For what purpose did God save us?" Let's examine each component of Ephesians 2:10 to fully grasp Paul's teaching.



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Observation: Our Nature, God's Action

In the *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, it's important to look closely at every detail.¹ For example, although the word *for* in Ephesians 2:10 is small, it is significant to Paul's thoughts as they flow from verses 8 and 9 into verse 10.

Summarize Paul's message in 2:8–9. Particularly note who does all the “work” of salvation.

The emphasis is on God in 2:8–9. “*God* saved you by *his* grace,” apart from our works (Ephesians 2:8, emphasis added). Paul concludes his point with the word, *for*, emphasizing again God and His work: “For we are *God's* masterpiece” (2:10, emphasis added). Since our works could not earn our salvation or raise us to life, what must we conclude? We are not who we are because of self-effort. Instead, we are *God's* creation. As the Artist, He signs His autograph on our lives and deserves all the recognition and glory for who we are and all we accomplish.

To what is Paul referring in this statement: “He has created us anew in Christ Jesus” (2:10)? Hint: review 2:4–6 to find the answer. Also, look ahead to 4:24 for additional insight.



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Another small word, *so*, conveys a very important idea—the purpose for which God saved us. According to Paul, we are God's masterpiece created anew in Christ Jesus for what purpose (2:10)?

Although our good works don't contribute to our salvation, they glorify God, help us reveal Him to the world, testify to the reality of our faith, and express our God-given gifts. In other words, they fulfill the purpose for which we were created and saved.

Are there no works for us to do since we are saved by an act of grace? Our works don't get us into heaven, but our works prove we're in. Works-based theology has this equation: faith plus works equals salvation. Grace-based theology teaches: faith equals salvation followed by works. —Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: The Meaning of Masterpiece

In the interpretation phase of *Searching the Scriptures*, we unlock the meaning of this passage, and the key is the Greek word for “masterpiece,” *poiema*. The online NET Bible at NetBible.org translates *poiema* as “creative work,” emphasizing the creativity in God's workmanship.

In the following verses from the NET Bible, highlight or circle the words *works*, *work*, *creative*, and *created*.

[Salvation] is not from works, so that no one can boast. For we are his creative work, having been created in Christ Jesus for good works that God prepared beforehand so we can do them.
(Ephesians 2:9–10 NET Bible)



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We're saved by grace “for good works.” According to these verses, how did God transform us so that our works can be good works?

Later in Ephesians 4–6, Paul will clarify with examples what he means by “good works,” but for now, he simply says that these actions were “prepared beforehand that we would walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10 NASB).

What does this phrase mean? Consult your resources for the answer, including Chuck's commentary on Ephesians, *Insights on Galatians, Ephesians*. For an online resource, you can find an explanation of this phrase in *Constable's Notes* at NetBible.org.

God is the artist. He's putting us together just as He would have us go together. It's wonderful! Our whole life begins to be transformed and we live out that new life for His glory and by His strength and power. —Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: God's New Creation

Paul also pointed out God's creative work in our lives in *2 Corinthians 5:17*. Reflect on this verse in light of what Paul taught in Ephesians 2:8–10 about God joining us to Christ, raising us from the dead with Christ, creating us anew in Christ, and making us His masterpiece.



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What do you think Paul means by saying we're a "new creature" (2 Corinthians 5:17 NASB)? What has "passed away" and what "new things have come" (5:17 NASB)?

In his commentary on Ephesians, Chuck sums up the purpose of our salvation:

"What difference does salvation make in my life?" . . . [God's] plan for our lives does not end when we receive the message of the gospel and receive eternal salvation by grace through faith apart from works. Rather, this experience simply marks the beginning of our Christian life as new creatures "in Christ Jesus" (2:10). His plan extends beyond salvation to sanctification, beyond standing in grace to walking in good deeds."²

How encouraging! God charted a path for our lives long before we were born. Then He saved us and created us anew in Christ so that we could walk in that path. It is God's work from beginning to end!



Application: Masterpieces on a Mission

God's masterpieces aren't designed to hang on a museum wall and collect dust. God created us to do the good things that He designed us to do.

What good thing do you think God designed for you to do today? An encouraging word to a child? A thoughtful act of service done in Jesus' name? A decision to forgive someone who wounded you? Your good deed may seem small, but when God is working through you, the impact is always great. Where does God's good path lead you today?



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Made alive in Christ, His life now flows through your works of kindness, love, mercy, and grace—all reflections of God's own good works. As the beauty of artwork testifies to the skill of the artist, so does God's work in us give glory to the Artist who made us His masterpiece. You are God's masterpiece! Let that truth encourage you today.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I will never forget the wonder of Your grace poured over me through Christ. You saved me from a life of futility and put me on a path that You charted long before I was born. Thank You for Your marvelous handiwork in my life that traces back to my birth, leads to my salvation, and culminates in following Jesus. I am Your masterpiece. Use me as You please. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. To learn about Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."
2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Galatians, Ephesians*, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary, vol. 8 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2015), 192.



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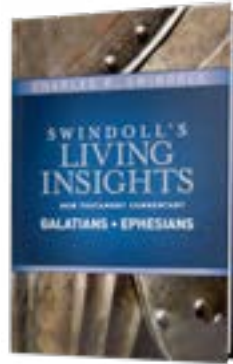
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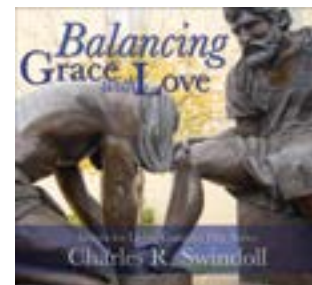
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For the 2020 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Bryce Klabunde, vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Studies, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.

