

“Not Saved by Works”
(Ephesians 2:8-9)

I. Introduction.

A. Orientation.

This morning,

We're again reminded

That we are not saved by our works,

But by work of Christ alone –

If you've trusted Him

Your sins are forgiven,

You have His perfect righteousness imputed to you,

And His Spirit lives in your soul –

You have a new/divine nature,

You have everything

We've been looking at –

The whole package.

But I hope at the same time

It's becoming clearer

That it still matters what we do

With what God has given us.

We're not all going to be equally useable,

Because we all respond differently –

Regeneration is a sovereign act of God –
He makes us alive,
He justifies us by the righteousness of His Son –
But sanctification includes our efforts –
The more we try to be like Jesus,
And actually succeed,
The more He will look at us,
And use us,
Because the more useable we'll be.

B. Preview.

Today, we're going to consider
Something else He looks for –
Two things actually –
That both have to do with works:
1. On the one hand, that He's looking for those
Who don't trust their works for their acceptance,
2. And on the other, that He's looking for those
Who are zealous for works.

This morning, let's consider
That the Lord is looking for those
Who aren't trusting in their works

For their acceptance with Him.

We'll see three things:

1. That it's impossible to save yourself by doing works.
2. That you didn't save yourself – God saved you through His Son.
3. The more you understand this, the more useful you'll be.

II. Sermon.

A. Let's consider first

That it's impossible for you to save yourself by your works.

That's what Paul is arguing in our text.

1. He first asks,

How many good works

Can a dead man do?

The answer is none.

That's what you were

When God came to you:

You were dead –

Not physically –

Your heart was beating –

But spiritually –

It wasn't beating for God:

“And you were dead in your trespasses and sins” (v. 1).

Why were you dead?

Because of a choice

A man made many years ago

In a Garden God planted.

Adam sinned in that garden for you –

As your representative.

It's not the choice

You would have wanted,

But it's the one he made.

And when he did

He killed you.

His guilt became your guilt

Because he represented you.

His guilt –

Which became yours at conception –

Brought another problem with it:

Corruption –

It gave you an evil heart.

You were born guilty

And with an evil heart.

Just how much good

Could you have done

With a guilty and corrupt heart?

The answer is none.

2. Paul asks second,

How could those

Who have aligned themselves with God's enemy,

Please Him?

The answer is, you can't.

Because you were born guilty and corrupt,

You weren't born in God's kingdom,

But Satan's.

That's why you went the direction you did –

“According to the course of this world,

“According to the prince of the power of the air” –

Why you lived the way you did –

In the lusts of your flesh,

“Indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind” –

You were no different

Than anyone else in this world –

Living for your own pleasure,

Trying to gain attention for yourself,

Rather than for God's pleasure,

And trying to gain attention for Him.

How much can you please God

When you're in His enemy's camp

Doing the things He hates?

You can please Him

About as much as Satan does.

3. Paul asks third,

How much could you please God

When you were under His wrath?

Which is what it means

To be children of wrath.

You were guilty,

And corrupt,

Doing the same things

The devil would do

If he were in your shoes.

Should you expect a better outcome?

If you're going to live like the devil,

You're going to end up

In the same place as the devil.

He doesn't bring the unrighteous to heaven –

He condemns them to hell

For their sins –

Not because He's mean,

But because He's just.

How can you save yourself

If you're spiritually dead,

Living like the devil,

And already under God's wrath?

The point is: You can't!

And the fact is: You didn't!

B. If you didn't save yourself,

Then who did?

God did!

He did it all!

Paul tells us

It had nothing to do with you,

And everything to do with Him –

God, being rich in mercy,

Because of His great love,

With which He loved you,

Even when you were dead in your sins,

Made you alive with Christ.

When you were still His enemy,
He sent His Son to take your place –
To live for you,
And to die for you –
So that He could give you His Spirit –
The Spirit He justly removed
From Adam for his sin,
And from his children
For their sin in him –
He sent His Son
To make you spiritually alive again.

His salvation is so complete
That He says you're already seated
In the heavenly places in Christ –
Which doesn't mean
That you're now physically in heaven with Him,
But since you are in union with Him,
And He is in heaven,
You are in heaven in principle
And one day will be in reality,
As surely as Jesus is now.

And why did He do all this for you?

Was it because of something good He saw?

No, there was nothing good in you.

Was it because of something good you did?

No, there is none who does good (Rom. 3:12).

Was it because you had faith?

You couldn't believe in Him

Anymore than a corpse can believe.

Jesus says, "The flesh profits nothing" (John 6:63).

It didn't have to do with you,

It had everything to do with Him:

Because of His love and mercy,

That He had for you from all eternity.

In case you still don't get it,

Paul spells it out even more clearly:

"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast."

You weren't saved by your works,

But by God's grace.

Grace is just the opposite of works –

It's something given freely,

A free gift.

Even the faith to receive this gift

Was freely given to you by God.

There are no works involved –

At least, none of yours –

So that you would never be able to boast.

It is from first to last

God's work alone

Through His Son.

C. And so what does God look for

When He looks throughout the earth?

He's looking for someone

Who trusts in His love and mercy alone

For their whole hope of heaven –

For someone who knows

To whom they owe the whole debt –

Who knows they're bankrupt

And don't deserve heaven –

For someone who is thankful

For that mercy,

Because they understand it.

Are you that kind of person?

Of course, you have to be,

To be a Christian.

But there are ways

You can still be tempted to think

That somehow your works save you

Or keep you in God's grace.

And to the degree that you do

To that degree it will weaken you.

You know you're not save by your works,

But how often have you based

Your assurance that you're going to heaven

On your works?

I don't mean as the evidence that you're saved,

But for your assurance that you'll be accepted by God?

When you think like this:

How can God save me,

How can He let me into heaven?

I was so sinful before He found me;

I loved the world so much,

Indulged in the things of the world,

Went the direction the world was going.

I was so immoral, so impure,
Did so many things to hurt myself and others.
How can He ever forgive me?

I've done so little since He's saved me –
I haven't read His Word as I should,
Or prayed,
Or honored His day,
Or attended His worship,
Or supported His work.
I've lived so much for myself
And so little for Him.

I've done so little for the souls of others –
I haven't prayed for them,
Witnessed to them,
Or even cared how I acted around them.
So many people I know
Have already left this world
And I did so little
To help them get ready for it.
How can the Lord let me into heaven?

It's true that if our salvation depended
On how well we've done,

We'd all be damned.

That's what we deserve –

But that's not what He deserves,

And if you are trusting Him,

You will get into heaven

Only because He deserves it –

Not you!

The point is,

As long as you focus on your own faults

Lament the fact that you fall short,

And wonder whether you're a Christian at all,

Rather than trusting the righteous of Jesus,

It not only takes away

From the credit God deserves for saving you,

But it cripples you from doing

What you might otherwise be able to do

For His glory.

The Lord wants you to move forward.

He wants you to trust

That your soul is safe

Because of what He has done

Through His Son,

So that you can get to work for Him.

He wants the fact

That it is all of His grace –

That it is a free gift –

To stir you up to thankfulness

To motivate you to move forward.

In other words,

God is looking for you

Simply to trust Him for your salvation

So you can get down to serving Him.

You will never be able to do this as you should

Until you can trust His grace alone.

Do you trust Him this morning?

And is that trust strong enough

To allow you to move forward?

If it isn't,

You'll never be able

To work for Him

As He calls you to.

You will spend your whole life

Looking for the assurance

He has already given you in His Son.

If you can't move forward

Because you fear you're not saved

Because of your many failures,

Then may the Lord help you to see

That He does justify the ungodly

Through faith in His Son (Rom. 4:5).

He saves those who are far from perfect

And uses them to advance His kingdom

That He might glorify His grace.

If you are His,

May He show you clearly that you are.

On the other hand,

If you really are trusting in your works

To make you right with God –

And not the work Jesus has done –

May the Lord help you to see

That your very best

Is nothing more than a mound of manure in His eyes –

Because you're spiritually dead,

An ally of God's enemy,

And under His wrath.

May He chase you out of your own righteousness

To the righteousness He gives as a free gift

Through faith in His Son. Amen.

<http://www.graceopmodesto.org>