

FOLLOW THE PLAN
Ephesians 2:10

INTRODUCTION

One time I was called the bedside of a dying woman. She did not go to church, but she knew she would die soon and wanted to prepare for her funeral. She found the number for our church and had me summoned. I would soon discover that she had called me as one of the last acts of defiance against her family. She was from a traditional Italian family, and very devoted Catholics. In order to get at them one more time before she died, she wanted someone to do the funeral that they would find offensive. She thought a Baptist pastor would do. I didn't know all this when I came to visit her. So I introduced myself, discerned that her situation was indeed dire, and comforted her by explaining the gospel. I didn't get far. As soon as I told her that God was good and that He loved her, she stopped me with the words, "If He loves me, why am I dying?" Her heart was hardened, and I regret to say that I didn't make a dent. However, her logic was not without merit completely.

Her expectation was that if God loved her, He would prove that in His actions, not just in the words of a preacher. She was saying, "If He loved me, He'd prove it in the way He acts." What she didn't know, and wasn't in the mood to hear about, is that He did just that. He proved His love for her by taking a very specific course of action. God's love is not just a sentiment. It is expressed in the way He behaves. You could even say that His love is expressed in His good deeds. Let's look at a text that shows us this:

Ephesians 2:4-10 4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ- by grace you have been saved- ,

Verse 4 informs us that God's love for us is great. He doesn't have just a little love, but His love is great. Some think, "If God just loves me a little, just shows me a little favor that will be enough. I don't have to be someone He goes bananas over, just someone He can find it in His heart to be kind to, that is enough". But it is not that way with God. He loves greatly, and He has so much mercy on us that He must be described as wealthy with mercy. That is the sentiment. That is the words that describe His love. But they are more than words. He also does good deeds that display that love. Verse 5 says that "when we were dead in our sins...." He made us alive!

The action being referred to here is the cross. God placed His own Son on a cross to die in your stead. That is as good a deed as anyone could do for another. No one could do any good deed that would express more love. Our trespasses, our sins, had killed us. Our souls had no life in them, and our destiny, due to our sinfulness was hell. But God, because of His love, did a great deed, and took away our sins by substituting Jesus who was punished for our sins, not His own, for He had none. If this woman on her death bed had only known, if she would have only listened, she would have discovered that He gives the dying life, life from the dead.

Then there is this phrase: by grace you have been saved. What does this mean? It means

this: He saved you as an undeserved gift. This is a very interesting dynamic: God loves us and acts on that love by giving His greatest treasure on the cross in order to save us. He does a good deed because He loves us. But He does not do this deed to cause us to love Him. This subtle difference is huge. In our world, we believe love needs to be earned by our behavior and then maintained in the same way. “What can I do to make you love me?” This is the question in our minds. We live in a world where grace is foreign. In fact, people might love you at one time, and then, if you misbehave against them, they will stop loving you and even hate you. You see, we do good deeds for others largely to get them to love us and to keep on loving us. This is not grace. But God already loves us. His good deed is not to motivate us to love Him back. What can we learn about love from God in this passage? These two things: 1) Real love cannot be earned. And 2) Real love always does good works for the beloved. Let’s move on.

6 and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

The good deeds of God that prove that His love is true go on. Here we see that He not only gave us life, but He has placed us in a position of relationship to Him so that we can enjoy His love forever. He didn’t raise us to life so that He could place us off in a little home somewhere and ignore us. You know, like when you buy a parakeet, you love the little bird. So you buy him a little cage and you put him there. Then you ignore him till he dies. But you love your little bird, so you do feed him. But the people you really love get a better position in the relationship. You don’t put your wife or your child in a cage and say, “I love you, I’ll feed you, you stay there till you die.” No, you bring them into your life. They eat with you, work with you, play with you, enjoy conversation with you, and receive constant expressions of your love.

You might think, “Well, if God does any good deeds for me, He’ll only treat me like someone who is worth a little bit of love. He won’t position me so that I can relate to Him as if I’m someone real important”. You think that because you naturally think that love must be earned, that it is not free and simply grace based. Your natural thinking is wrong.

He saved us through the cross so that He could place us in His home and for ages and ages to come show us His immeasurable riches of kindness. He wants us for ages to come to find out more and more of His kindness. Think about that for a second. If God has shown you so much kindness here –and He has for He has not only given you forgiveness of sins through Jesus, but also through Him has given you all that you have on this earth, all the beauty, all the life, all the people, all the blessings– if He has shown you so much, imagine how much He loves you if He will continue to bless you more and more in age after age to come.

His kindness to you is immeasurable, the text says. This means, you cannot measure it.

This means it is infinite. This means that for eternity, your lot in life will improve and continue to improve as you learn more about the kindness of God in a never-ending, always-improving life. You might think, “But what did I do to deserve this?” The answer is love is not about what you deserve. What you deserve? That would be punishment for your great sins. But He loves you and constantly proves it by His good deeds done to you, and will continue this forever. Let’s move on. Note in the next two verses, Paul is summing up what he has already said.

8. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9. not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Paul makes this formula clear for us. Our salvation is the result of an act of the love of God. It is not the result of our merit or of our performance. This goes against the way we think of love. We think love must be earned and maintained. If you don’t believe it, ask Big Ben! He used to be the most loved person in Pittsburgh. Now he is the most despised. Why is he despised? Because he didn’t behave. He didn’t continue to do the deeds that proved he was worthy of love. This is how we think. We often think God doesn’t love us because we are not doing the deeds to prove we are worthy. But you are not saved by that. You are saved because God initiated the salvation, motivated as He was not by your goodness or your deeds, but by His Kindness.

Furthermore, some people think, “Well, God loves me if He loves anyone, because I’m as good as anyone and better than most”. You are making the same mistake, thinking that love is earned. If it was earned, you wouldn’t make it anyway. Your pride is blinding you. You are not impressive to God. In fact, you are a sinner and dead in your sins. No one can boast before God that they had anything to do with saving themselves; no one. You are saved because God acted out of love. He sent His Son to die for you. Then He raised Him. Then He made sure you heard about this and then He gave you the faith to believe it.

You are no more responsible for your being born again than you are to your being born. That might be hard to understand because we can think, “Hey, I am smart enough to know a good deal when I see it. I wanted God. I’m the one looking for Him. I’m the one who chose Him”. All that is true, but none of that came from you. You were dead in your sins and unable to want Him, seek Him, or choose Him. You couldn’t because you hated Him. The reason you sought Him is that He, as a gift, gave you the desire, and eventually, He gave you the faith to believe. It is the gift of God. Now, believe it or not, all that we have said up till now is only the introduction. We have not yet arrived at our text for today (but we are almost there). Let me sum up what we have learned.

- 1. God’s Love for us is great and cannot be earned***
- 2. God’s Love is always proved by actions, good deeds done towards us.***
- 3. The highest expression of His love is the giving of His Son for our sins***
- 4. It is by His kindness alone (grace) not our behavior that we are loved and saved***

Okay, now let's move to our text for today, for it is the very next verse in the passage:

TEXT: EPHESIANS 2:10

10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

We, you and I who know Jesus, are His artwork. If you pick up a product, somewhere on that, it says who made it. You can find the country of origin, the company who made it, who distributed it, etc. And, in certain items, that doesn't matter. But with some it does. People who are serious about wine are most serious first about who made it, because that tells them about grape quality, and the wine making process. People buying art want to know who created it. People buying music want to know who performed it. Nothing is more important, in fact, when it comes to art, than, "Who made it?" The quality of the art depends on the answer.

We are God's workmanship. Let that sink in a little. You might go through life unimpressed with yourself, your personality, your looks, your brains. But you are His workmanship, and now He has saved you. He has a plan and you planned by Him. Not only that, but as you have been raised in Christ, you are His creation and made for work. Good works. Now, let's take this one step a time. We know that your doing good works will not save you, for His love never depended on that. But we see here that as you have received the gift of salvation that comes from His love, He desires you to do good works.

Now, be very careful here. You might think, "Yes, and if I don't do these good works, then He'll stop loving me." This is wrong. It is what most all Christians struggle with though. We feel, "How can He love me if I have not behaved better every day, have not worked for Him well enough?" The answer is; He never based His love for you on how you behaved. Some people even build theologies that say, if you don't do good works His love for you will fade away. Just like the love for Big Ben has faded away because he didn't behave. But this is not so. But He still wants you to do good works. You might say, "Why? Why should I do good works if He's going to love me anyway?" Has it not occurred to you that if gaining love is the wrong reason to do good works, that there might be a right reason for doing good works?

Let me answer the question, "Why do good works?" by going back to what we have already seen. God loves us. But it is not just a sentiment. His love always acts with good deeds on our behalf. This passage has shown us that His main good deed was to send His Son to save us. The second good deed is to place us in relationship with Him so that forever He can shower His loving good deeds on us.

Now, follow this, if we are made in His image, but fallen and dead in sins, and then He loves us and serves us and makes us alive through His Son, and the life of His Son now lives in us, isn't it logical that we would begin to behave like He does? How is that? Love Him; in words only? No, love him in words and in good deeds we do for Him. Why do the good deeds for Him? So that He will love us? No. He already loves us. Because that is how love behaves. It serves those it loves.

The greatest commands are “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself.” If you are going to do this, you don’t want anyone saying of you what that dying woman wrongly said of God, “If He loves me, why doesn’t He do good to me?” If you love God, you will do good works. Why? Out of pleasure. Love always serves out of pleasure. If you love God, you will love other people? Why? Out of pleasure.

Now, here is where the rubber really meets the road and where we are capable to bring power from out of this world into this world: we can change the rules of love we live by. So many Christians wrongly love by worldly standards. They love those that are kind to them. Why? Because it’s not real love. Real love is God’s love and God’s love doesn’t love based on behavior. Most of the people you are kind to, I’d wager, you would stop being kind to, you’d stop loving, if they don’t behave correctly towards you. Now that Jesus has given you His life, you are capable of a different kind of love. Now you can love people who don’t behave. And this love cannot be lip-service only. Not if it’s love. Love will always do good works. Love always serves.

CONCLUSION

In our world, you are going to constantly be encouraged to do good deeds for yourself alone. Buy yourself this; be good to yourself, etc. But this is not God’s plan for you. God’s plan for you is that you live a life of service and good deeds to others –to Him, and to all. Why? To earn His love? No again. But because that is what love does. And He has planned out your good works for you. Verse 10 ends with saying that God has prepared beforehand the works that you are to do. That means at least two things: one, you can do the good deeds God planned for you, and two, no one else can do them. God has put you where you are in life because he wants you to do what He has planned for you to do.

Here is what you must remember from this message: We love others in good deeds, every day, all day, because He first loved us. We have been saved and blessed beyond measure, by the kindness of God, and by nothing else. Now, go and bless God and others with your actions, by your kindness, by your love, and not based on their behavior. This is the higher way. It is the Jesus way. Find a human. Any human, and do a good deed for him or her, out of a heart of love, wanting to bless them without them earning it. Make it a person who is least likely for you to love. Choose the people you have never chosen. Choose the people you have chosen against. Love them. Do good works for them. And as you do them, trust that the sovereign God who plans all things is fulfilling His plans through you.