

Ephesians 2:8-10

“We Are Saved By Grace Alone”

It’s a question everyone needs to be asked: Why are you going to heaven? Unfortunately, it’s a question that not everyone knows the answer to. Why are you going to heaven?

“Well, I lead a pretty good life. I go to church. I’ve never killed anyone. I’ve never robbed a bank. I’ve never cheated on my wife. I’m a pretty good person, better than most anyway. I’m certainly not as bad as the people that you see on the six o’clock news. That’s why I’m going to heaven.”

“Well, I know that God demands a lot but he really only expects that we do our best. I try to lead a good life. Each day I try to be a better person than the one I was the day before. For every bad thing I do I try to do at least one good thing. I know that God sees that I’m trying hard; I’m sincere. That’s why I’m going to heaven.”

“All you have to do to get to heaven is believe. Three years, two months and eight days ago I made my decision for Christ. I opened my heart and invited Christ to be my personal Savior. I am committed to Christ and I know that because I believe I will go to heaven.”

“I’m not so sure that I am going to heaven. God demands perfection. I know that I could never be perfect. I’m just not a very good person. I have too many skeletons in my closet. I would really have to turn my life around and get some different priorities before God could forgive me. And even then I just don’t know that God could forgive me for some of the things I’ve done.”

Why are you going to heaven? Were any of those answers your answer? I pray not. We are going to heaven for one reason and one reason alone. Jesus Christ lived a perfect life in our place. Jesus Christ paid for our sins with his death on the cross. Jesus Christ rose from the dead on the third day. And the Holy Spirit brought us to faith in Jesus. Through that God-given faith we receive not only God’s free forgiveness but also the righteousness of his Son. That – and that alone – is why we are going to heaven. We are saved by grace alone.

Listen as the Apostle Paul emphasizes that very point in this afternoon’s Reformation sermon text. Ephesians 2:8-10. **“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”** Why are we going to heaven? – One word answers that question: grace. We are saved by grace alone. Paul explains 1.) No, we’re not saved by good works 2.) but, yes, we are saved to do good works. While good works play no role in our justification, may the Holy Spirit open our eyes of faith to see the role that good works do play in our sanctification.

1. No, we’re not saved by good works

This afternoon’s text is distinctively Lutheran. We are saved by grace alone. Grace is God’s undeserved love for sinners that moved him to rescue us from sin and death in the person of Jesus Christ. Notice how Paul piles up terms – almost to the point of redundancy. **1. It is by grace you have been saved. 2. Through faith. 3. And this not from yourselves. 4. It is the gift of God. 5. Not by works. 6. So that no one can boast.** It’s almost as if we want to say, “OK, Paul, enough already. We’ve got it. We understand. We understand that we did nothing – that we can do nothing – to save ourselves. God did it all. It’s all free. It’s all a gift. It’s all grace” ---- Why do you suppose Paul is so redundant, so repetitive, on this one point – grace alone?

– Because our sinful nature – our human pride – needs to be reminded of this Gospel truth everyday. Like it or not, there is a part of us that tells us, “We’re not so bad.” There is a part of us that says, “Nothing in life is free. Certainly we have to do something to get right with God.” There

is a part of us that says, “I am a pretty good person. I do live a pretty good life. God must be pleased with me.” There is a part of us that wants to take credit for believing in Jesus. There is a part of us that wants to boast about who we are and the good things we’ve done. There is a part of us that wants to compare ourselves to other people who are not as good as we are.

The reality is that nothing good lives in us – that is, in our sinful nature. The reality is found in the verses just prior to the sermon text. **“As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world . . . we were by nature objects of God’s wrath . . . gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts.”** If our sinful pride and arrogance in thinking that there is something good in us that we can offer God and thus be saved weren’t enough to condemn us then certainly the sinful cravings and desires and thoughts that we had and that we gratified this past week are.

Objects of wrath before a just Judge can’t offer 90%, 50%, 10% or even 1% of what it would take to be declared not guilty. 100% was demanded. 100% needed to be given. Since we couldn’t give it, God in his grace so loved the world that he gave that 100% for us in his Son who was lifted up just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert. God’s grace. Distinctively Lutheran. God did it all. Jesus is our Substitute. He is our Substitute in life who lived perfectly under God’s law for us never once having sinful cravings, desires or thoughts – much less ever giving in to them. He is our Substitute in death who died as the one and only object of God’s wrath, enduring hell in our place, giving his life as the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Jesus’ resurrection assures us that God accepted both his substitutionary life and his substitutionary death in our place.

2. But yes, we are saved to do good works

Notice, what God demanded God freely gives. (What did God demand? – 1. That we be holy and 2. That the wages of our sin [death] be paid.) What God demanded of each one of us he gave each one of us in the person of Jesus Christ. We are saved by grace alone. There was nothing that we could have done to save ourselves – we didn’t have it in us. There is no longer anything that we need to do to save ourselves – Christ has already done it all. Through faith in Jesus – faith that the Holy Spirit gives, faith that the Holy Spirit strengthens through Word and Sacrament – we receive God’s gifts of forgiveness, righteousness and salvation. But notice that the sermon text didn’t stop at verse 9. Notice that Paul didn’t stop at verse 9. Notice that Scripture doesn’t stop at verse 9. While the doctrine of justification (God declares sinners “Not Guilty” in Christ) stops at verse 9 – our justification is complete – the doctrine of sanctification (how we live in response to God’s declaration of “Not Guilty”) is just getting started. We are saved by grace alone. No, we are not saved by good works but, yes, we are saved to do good works.

“For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” We are God’s workmanship. He created us in Christ Jesus. He created us in Christ Jesus not to blend in with crowd, not to fall through the cracks, not even to hold the pendulum on the justification side of its swing in fear that we will somehow be labeled a pietist or as work righteous or as un-Lutheran if we ever dare to talk sanctification or good works or Christian living, if we ever dare to use the law as a guide in our lives of faith. We are God’s workmanship created in Christ Jesus to do good works – good works that will bring glory to God, good works that will thank God for the good work of Christ, good works that will display our love for God as we show love to our neighbor, good works that can serve as bridges and doors to sharing our faith – to sharing God’s grace.

This too (our sanctification) is distinctively Lutheran. We are God’s workmanship. He created us in Christ Jesus. He empowers us to do good works. He motivates us to do good works. He is even the one who has prepared those good works in advance for us to do. Notice – even in our sanctification, just as it was in our justification, who alone deserves all of the credit? – That’s right, God does. God deserves all of the credit for the good works that he has enabled and

empowered us to do and to say. God deserves all of the credit for providing us with opportunities to live our faith. God deserves all of the credit for empowering our faith to produce fruit.

What opportunities has God prepared for you? What good works has God prepared in advance for you? I'm not sure. I can't say for sure . . . but isn't it exciting to think about? It's exciting to think: "How can I as a parent, how can I as a spouse, how can I as a child, how can I as an employer or employee, how can I as a Christian friend or neighbor, how can I as a member of my congregation live my faith and give glory to God?" That's exciting to think about it, isn't it? But, then again, more exciting than just thinking to ourselves, more exciting than just asking ourselves, "What good works has God prepared for me to do today?" is to actually go out and do them!

Why are we going to heaven? Not because we do good works. Not because we are good people. Not because we try hard. Not because we are sincere. Not even because we believe; (we are saved *through* faith, not *because* of faith). Why are we going to heaven? – Because God, in his grace, saved us in Christ. What will we do in the meantime? – By God's grace we will celebrate the Lutheran Reformation by doing the good works that God has prepared in advance for us to do. Amen.