



Salvation Negatives, 2

“Not as a Result of Works”

“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. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them” (Ephesians 2:8–10).

Salvation is not by “bulls and goats” (Hebrews 10:4). A second negative of salvation was expressed most clearly by Paul in Ephesians 2: “Not as a result of works, so that no one may boast” (Ephesians 2:9). Paul preceded this negation with the greatest of all affirmations: “For by grace you have been saved through faith” (v. 8a). With the one word “grace,” Paul asserted that only God can provide salvation for us. It is a “gift of God,” he said, and all we can do is accept it. We cannot buy it, borrow it, or build it; we cannot achieve it, accumulate it, or assume it; we can only receive it through obedient faith.

Paul used the term “works” in this context to describe the efforts of man, his keeping perfectly God’s laws, his doing good deeds, his living in moral excellence. Holding all of these attainments in view and using the one word “not,” he eliminated them from the method of salvation. We may want to ask, “Paul, what if we perfectly keep God’s commandments?” He says, in effect, “No, we have no perfect obedience to offer.” We say, “Paul, what about all the good deeds that we do?” He says, “No, they are inadequate to provide the source of salvation.” We say, “Paul, how about our good character that we have acquired and exhibit?” He says, “No, our character is flawed through and through.”

Considering the negative of “not as a result of works” will accent for us the true nature of the salvation that God has provided.

We can say, first, that human works are not pure

enough to save us. That is, the origin of human works makes them inadequate to forgive our sins. God required a sacrifice for our salvation that possessed the characteristic of human perfection. For this reason, Jesus did not make His offering for sin in heaven; He came to earth, received a human body, and lived as one of us, facing the tempter with only the resources that you and I have.

From His birth to His burial, He lived a sinless life. The Holy Spirit has said,

Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation, being designated by God as a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek (Hebrews 5:8–10).

The enigmatic figure Melchizedek was unique in that God chose him to be a priest because of an unusual life; Jesus is unique in that He lived a perfect life among us. Because of the perfect life that He lived, Jesus was uniquely qualified to be our Savior.

As we relate this truth to human works, we can easily observe that no human efforts can be offered to God out of a perfect life. Anyone who approaches God with human works to procure his salvation will be bringing works from a broken, sinful heart. These works cannot provide salvation. Salvation produces good works, but good works cannot produce salvation.

Second, it is obvious that human works are not big enough to save us. They do not have the qual-

ity that is needed to provide atonement. Good works are not good enough to save us. They simply cannot atone for our sins. For salvation to be effected, God had to send Someone, Jesus, who could bear the weight of the guilt of the world. While “bulls and goats” could not carry all that weight of guilt, Jesus could. His humanity, His becoming one of us, achieved the identity needed, and His deity fulfilled the requirement of intensity. No human being, not even the noblest and best of people, could bear the intense weight of the world’s sin. Jesus, the second member of the Godhead, being the infinite personality that He is, offered Himself as the atoning sacrifice for our sin. His suffering, His blood, and His death provided the payment needed for our forgiveness.

Third, we must notice that human works are not timeless enough to save us. The temporal nature of human works eliminates them from providing any atonement for us. They pay no price for sin, and no one can do one great, super deed that would satisfy the whole of the justice of God. Christian people are to be performing good works every day, every hour, for the rest of their lives. Human works spring from hearts that have been redeemed by God, but no human work is big enough to pay the price for redemption.

Because of the holy justice of God, all sin must be punished so that God can be just as He provides justification for us (Romans 3:26). Salvation required a supreme sacrifice that would be a “once for all” sacrifice for sin; but good works are to be a steady stream of compassion, service, and selflessness that flows out of the sanctified heart. Through His redeeming work in us, we have become “. . . His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10).

One who is desperately ill lives in a body which has been wrecked by a devastating disease. Tissue has been corrupted, and organs have been weakened. The blood stream may be anemic and unable to fight bacteria that have invaded the body. What if the doctors gathered around this dying person and said, “You must go out and do good works if you want to get well. Feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and share your wealth with the poor”? Certainly, the good works mentioned are to be embraced, but such diligence will not heal a disease. The proper medical care must be given to the body. No level of good works can procure a person’s health. The medicine that is required may be available; perhaps research has been done, and the cure is at hand. However, unless the proper prescription is given and taken, the body will not be healed. Once the body is restored to its health, it can be used to do good works.

Jesus, the Great Physician, went to the cross and provided the redemption that every person needs. Each accountable soul has sinned, and that sin must be purged so that one can begin a new life in Christ. Only the death of Christ can set him free from the guilt and the condemnation of sin. Following the new birth, the washing in Jesus’ blood, the new convert becomes God’s workmanship through Christ, a trophy of God’s grace. Then he sets his heart upon growing in Christ and doing His work in the world. The order is salvation, life, then good works.

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“Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith” (Romans 3:27).