

BECAUSE OF CHRIST, EVERYTHING HAS CHANGED:

Joining God

Ephesians 2:8-10

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LISTEN: <http://www.fbcjc.org/sermon/because-of-christ-everything-has-changed-joining-god/>

The title of this sermon series is "Because of Christ, Everything Has Changed." So, what motivates spiritual growth, allowing ourselves to be changed by Christ? The answer is God's surprising kindness and grace (vv. 8-10). But make sure you have the order correct. Good works are a result of our salvation, not a cause of our salvation. To use Tim Keller's words, "Religion says, 'I obey, therefore I am accepted.' Christianity says, 'I'm accepted, therefore I obey.'"

If you think about it, we humans can really mess up this grace-works balance. We can emphasize grace so much that we fool ourselves into thinking we can live any old way we want, because we have fire insurance. But we can emphasize works so much that we actually try to earn our way to heaven, which cannot be done. Note v. 10. We are created for good works. The old KJV says, "that we might walk in them." Isn't God good? He prepares us and he prepares the work and the way. *The Message* translates it, "He creates each of us by Christ Jesus to join him in the work he does, the good work he has gotten ready for us to do..." As Henry Blackaby has said so often, the believer's job is to find out where God is working and join Him in that.

So, how do we join God in God's work? There are many ways to get at this, but this is often called "Christian practices" or spiritual disciplines. Wesley called them the means of holiness or the means of grace. Interestingly enough, some of those practices are referenced in Ephesians: 1) Baptism, 4:6; 2) Seeking God's will, 5:17; 3) Being filled with the Holy Spirit, 5:18; 4) Fellowship and worship, 5:19-20; 5) Prayer and Bible study, 6:17-18. Now, look at these. Do you notice what they have in common? They all have to do with intimate connection with God. They all assume that God is active in our world and lives. Baptism marks the beginning, and then the others are about a life of discerning and doing God's will after that beginning.

Let me offer an analogy of the relationship between grace and works, how these practices join us to God's work. Consider a simple trellis, or rose arbor in the back yard. The trellis is a human structure, designed to provide a framework for the supernatural growth of the plant. Likewise, our practices are the human intentionality we offer to provide a framework for the supernatural part God wants to do.

To paraphrase a Lutheran bishop, the most important spiritual discipline is not taking a vow of poverty; the greatest spiritual practice is not praying five times a day [*Pastrix*, by Nadia Bolz-Weber, p. 198]. The greatest Christian practice is just showing up--for others and for God. Showing up, allowing God to grow something beautiful on our trellis, joining God in God's work.

I have this theory. Jesus Christ and his grace are so huge, so epic in size and importance, that if we try to make them secondary, we only become miserable and muddled. What would happen in this place if Jesus Christ became the most important reality to us? If being changed by Christ became central to all that we do? If joining God in God's work became our obsession?