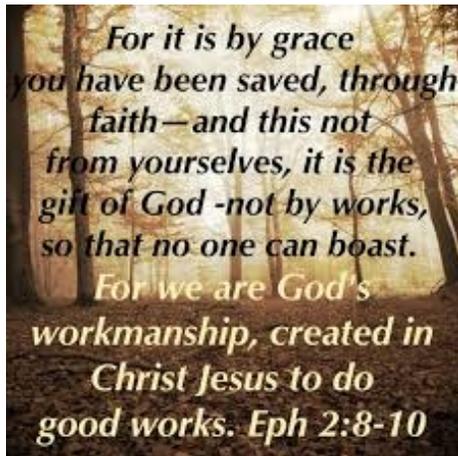


## LET'S READ THE WHOLE TEXT!

Ken Sheppard



Many Christians consider Ephesians 2:8-9 as one of their favorite passages. These truly are great verses. Everyone should know them by heart.

Now, think for a moment. Have you ever given consideration to the context of those verses? What was Paul thinking about when he wrote them? What's the big idea?

Notice, the chapter begins by describing us as having been dead in our trespasses and sins, children of wrath. But God, who is rich in mercy, has made us alive in Christ (born again, given a new nature), raised us to heavenly places (our position before Him, our standing in His sight) so He can demonstrate to us throughout all eternity the riches of His grace. And that begins the moment we trust Jesus as our Savior.

Then come the words so many know, believe, and sometimes take out of context! "For by grace have you been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not by works lest anyone should boast."

This clearly states that a person's works cannot save him. It is by grace (unmerited favor) that we have been saved through faith (personal trust in the risen Savior, Jesus) that one can know that he is rightly related to God. It is not of works, because that would give us a basis for bragging before God. That's the opposite of grace!

But please note what follows: "For we are *his workmanship*, created in Christ Jesus *unto* good works, which God *foreordained* that we should walk in them."

Our good works are the intended results of our faith in Jesus. And God has them already planned for us. Now, what are good works? They certainly aren't things we do *to* or *for* God. He doesn't need anything! You see, good works are always focused on meeting the needs of people around us. We are doing them for God in the sense that we are His hands, His feet, His mouth, helping others around us, reflecting God's grace and love to them. And He guides us to the people He wants us to bless.

Sadly, we find ourselves surrounded by people who are trying to work their way to heaven by good works. They are so very wrong. And so are Christians who think that it doesn't really matter if they focus on loving and serving those around them. It's the foreordained plan of God...don't ignore it!

The most powerful testimony anyone can give to others is a changed life. A clear grace message backed up by a grateful and gracious spirit draws people to Him!