

January 21, 2018

"All Scripture is God-breathed..."

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is 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."

Ephesians 2:8-10

"But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of...All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."

II Timothy 3:16-17

The author of the hymn "Amazing Grace", John Newton, was an interesting character. As a young man he was very rebellious and often got into trouble. He was conscripted into the British Royal Navy and after his service captained a ship involved in the slave trade. He had no real relationship with God until his ship was nearly wrecked during a storm off the coast of Ireland. After he became a minister he and a friend penned the words that would become the most popular hymn of our time.

It is likely that Newton, as he developed these lyrics, remembered his own life's experiences and maybe, because of those experiences, had a better understanding of grace than many of us do. The Apostle Paul would remind the Ephesian believers that we are saved by grace and not by anything we can do. It took the blood of Jesus, sacrificed as payment for our sins, to set us free from the ***"law of sin and death"***.

So, those of us who have experienced the grace of God have been saved by his amazing gift, but why did he save us? It is easy to see our response to God's grace as the end of our salvation. We have responded to that grace, we have surrendered our lives to his direction, we have seen our old existence buried in the waters of baptism, and we have been raised to walk in new life, so now what?

In reminding the Ephesians that they had been saved by grace, the Apostle would also remind them that they were saved, ***"...created in Christ Jesus to do good works..."***, because God had prepared good works ahead of time for them and for us to do. You and I are saved by God's grace, recreated through the blood of Jesus, and made new again in order to do the good things which God designed us to do. I think it is amazing that God has a plan for me, a specific plan, calling me to do the good things he has designed me to do.

This statement tells me, I think, that my only reasonable response to God's saving grace is my commitment to do those good works. The challenge of course is identifying those good works and finding the skills and energy to carry them out. And, of course, God has already provided for those things. Scripture is God's mechanism for preparing us to do the good things he has designed us to do.

Scripture is, Paul would explain to Timothy, God's tool for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting and for training in righteousness. Scripture is God's tool for equipping us for the good works he has prepared for us to be doing. There are a few basic precepts we need to accept if Scripture is going to do its work in us.

First, Scripture is from God so we cannot set aside what it teaches no matter how much the powers of this world pressure us to do so. Whatever we believe, whatever we practice, all of our attitudes and all of our actions must become informed by God's word.

Second, while teaching and training are key functions for God's word, so are rebuking and correcting. But, as we noted a couple of weeks ago, God's word works best when we point it at ourselves, and, yes, that does sometimes mean that God will be rebuking me and correcting me for my wrong attitudes and wrong actions.

Finally, the primary mission for God's word is equipping and preparing you and me to do good things. We are created through God's grace to do good works. Our Father prepared those good works for us to do and he is now preparing us to do them through his word. As God's new creation our lives are being transformed to do good works and those works are the final testament to our salvation.

