

**10 For we are His workmanship, created in Messiah Yeshua for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.**

This closing verse of the paragraph begins with the word “For” (γάρ, *gar*), which functions to give further substantiation that our salvation is the result of God’s grace and not because of our own efforts or works.

By setting aside the contrary supposition, he proves his statement, that by grace we are saved, — that we have no remaining works by which we can merit salvation; for all the good works which we possess are the fruit of regeneration. Hence it follows, that works themselves are a part of grace.<sup>1</sup>

...*we are His workmanship* – The Greek word translated “workmanship” (ποίημα, *poiēma*)<sup>2</sup> is found only one other time, in Rom 1:20.

For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made (ποίημα, *poiēna*), so that they are without excuse. (Rom 1:20)

In the same way that the physical world came into being through the power and sovereignty of the eternal Creator, so Paul speaks of the believer in Yeshua as a “new creation” (2Cor 5:17) and, as such, emphasizing that our new life in Messiah is fully the work of God even as the existence of the universe is entirely the result of divine fiat.

Consider once again the meaning and application of this grand truth: being His “workmanship,” we as believers have been made new so that we might proclaim His glory and greatness, even as the physical universe reveals the glory of God. The work of a true craftsman causes those who view his work to recognize his skill. Likewise, those who know us and view our lives should recognize that we are “His workmanship” by seeing in us a life that honors God by living in obedience to Him and bearing witness to a watching world that all which is good and righteous in us is because of God’s abundant grace.

...*created in Messiah Yeshua* – The verb “created” (κτισθέντες < κτίζω, *ktizō*) is an aorist participle which most often would envision an event

1 Calvin, *Ephesians*, p. 229.

2 We derive our English word “poem” from this Greek word, but this gives no warrant to the fanciful teaching that Paul’s meaning is “we are His poem,” a common teaching on internet sites in our day.

which took place in the past and is finished. Paul uses this grammar to emphasize that we were dead in trespasses and sins (v. 1) and that we were raised together with Yeshua in His resurrection. That is, the resurrection of Yeshua secured the eternal life of all whom He would save, for it was the resurrection of our Messiah that proved the value of His death. In His death He had conquered death (Heb 2:14), and all who are united in His death and resurrection likewise are victors over death. Since Yeshua died and rose once for all, it is an historic event never to be repeated.

Therefore Paul speaks of our being created in Him as a completed, past event which will never need to be repeated. Here, in the very language of the Apostle and his inspired words, we once again see the strong biblical teaching that no one who is truly born from above—who has been “created in Messiah Yeshua,” could ever run the risk of being separated from Him or to somehow “forfeit” eternal salvation. Even as our being brought to life in Yeshua is clearly the work of God’s sovereign grace, so it is by the power of His Spirit that we are enabled to persevere in faith and thereby to prove the eternal nature of our salvation.

This is likewise the emphasis of Paul’s assertion that “we are His workmanship.” As His workmanship, He has re-created us in Messiah Yeshua to be His eternally and nothing can overturn what He has ordained. As Paul asserts in his epistle to the Romans:

But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Messiah Yeshua our Lord. (Rom 8:37–39)

Persevere we must, and through God’s grace, persevere we will.

*...for good works* – The Greek of this phrase is ἐπὶ ἔργοις ἀγαθοῖς, where the preposition ἐπὶ (*epi*) could be understood to mean “on, above, or at the time of good works.” But this would clearly go against the obvious meaning of Paul in the previous context, and the preposition *epi* can also have the sense of “moving toward a goal” and that clearly is how Paul is using it here. Thus the phrase should be understood to mean “created in Messiah Yeshua *for the purpose* of good works.” This is the calling of every believer.

Clearly “good works” or living righteously in this world is not the means of gaining right-standing with God but the fruit of having been

made alive in Messiah. Here, once again, we see the Apostle's clear teaching regarding the newness of life which inevitably characterizes the person who has been saved by faith in Yeshua. The new life in Messiah is just that, a new life that is more and more aligned with God's will, separated unto Him and away from worldly things and desires. This is what is meant by "good works," for that which is "good" is defined as that which pleases our Redeemer.

... which<sup>1</sup> God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them. – Paul continues his emphasis upon the sovereign work of God, Who by His grace, initiates the process of salvation in those He would save. He does this by telling us that God "prepared" or "ordained" in advance the "good works" in which He intends His people to be engaged.

And how do we come to know what these "good works" are? We do so through the inspired Scriptures coupled with prayer and the fellowship of other believers. This requires that we immerse ourselves in the Scriptures with a commitment to obey what they teach us, and then to rely upon the leading of the Spirit as we regularly engage in prayer, seeking wisdom and ability to fulfill the good works which God has prepared for us.

This is what Paul means when he indicates that we are "to walk in them." The biblical metaphor of "walking" is the source of the term *halachah*, being derived from the Hebrew verb הָלַךְ, *hālach*, "to walk." Paul uses "walk" to describe the overall character of one's life. He uses this metaphor over 30 times in his epistles, and the clear parallel to our text is in Col 1:9–10.

For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; (Col. 1:9–10)

We see, then, how v. 10 forms a fitting "book end" that frames the opening paragraph of chapter two. In v. 2 our former "walk" was "according to the course of this world" but now, by God's grace, we have been recreated to "walk," i.e., to have lives that honor and please the One Who has redeemed us and given us eternal life.

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1 The pronoun translated "which" is the Greek οἷς, *hois*, which is in the dative rather than the accusative by means of attraction to its antecedent "good works" (ἔργοις ἀγαθοῖς) which is also in the dative.

**11–12 Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called “Uncircumcision” by the so-called “Circumcision,” which is performed in the flesh by human hands —remember that you were at that time separate from Messiah, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.**

*Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh* – Once again Paul begins this new paragraph with the word “Therefore,” in order that we would have in mind that which he has written in the previous ten verses, namely, to remember the helpless state that we were in before being called to God through the Gospel and the work of His sovereign grace. Paul calls his readers, including us, to “remember” the past and thereby to rejoice and be confirmed in our new life in Messiah. Moreover, the abundant blessing of our personal salvation in Yeshua gives way to even further blessings. For our new life in Messiah also brings about a corporate identity in that all who are in Messiah have been united together as one body of Messiah, and have entered an eternal covenant as covenant members with Him.

While clearly having both Jew and Gentile in his focus and describing all as under the wrath of God apart from faith in the person and work of Yeshua, now, in these opening verses of the paragraph, Paul focuses particularly upon the Gentile believers, and the specific issues they faced before God’s grace came to them in the Gospel. By once again using the word “formerly” (ποτέ, *pote*) as he did in v. 2, he is gathering together the picture presented there (vv. 1–3) of unbelievers who were previously “sons of disobedience” and “by nature children of [God’s] wrath” in order that they might further appreciate the magnitude of God’s powerful work on their behalf.

He refers to them in two ways: (1) as “Gentiles in the flesh” (τὰ ἔθνη ἐν σαρκί) and (2) as viewed by the Jewish community as the “uncircumcised” people. Both of these encapsulate how the Jewish community viewed Gentiles in general, for the term “Gentile” used here is ἔθνος (*ethnos*), a word which, in the Scriptures, often denotes the “nations” as delineated from “Israel.” Thus, within the Jewish community, “Gentile” came to mean “outsider,” “pagan,” “foreign,” and ultimately enemies of Israel and Israel’s God. That Paul refers to them as “Gentiles in the flesh” simply means that they were Gentiles “by birth.”

So entrenched was this idea of “Gentiles” in the minds of the Jewish communities that when the Spirit moved among the Gentile population, bringing many of them to faith in Yeshua, it caused a significant

problem even in the minds of some of the Jewish believers. We discover that there were some Jewish believers who held the view that apart from “legal Jewish status,” one could not be truly saved.

Some men came down from Judea and began teaching the brethren, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.” (Acts 15:1)

In fact, the term “Gentile” (*ethnos*) is used in some cases to refer to unbelievers in general, i.e., those whose lives are marked by paganism. When the term is used in this way, it is not denoting a particular ethnicity. Paul will use the term this way in chapter 4.

So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind.... (Eph 4:17)

Thus, the word “Gentile” can denote a “people-group,” which is distinct from those who are Jewish, but in the Scriptures “Gentile” can also be used to mean “unbeliever” (cf. Matt 18:17).

*who are called “Uncircumcision” by the so-called “Circumcision”* – It seems clear that already in the 1st Century there was set in place some Jewish, man-made ritual by which a Gentile was given “legal Jewish status” and that the basic requirement for such “Jewish legal status” was for males to be circumcised. Remember that in the time of the Maccabees circumcision became the mark of “legal Jewish status,” and it appears certain that this had continued on among the Jewish nation to differentiate those who are “part of us” and those who are “other” and even “against us.”

We read in 1Maccabees:

And Mattathias and his friends went about and tore down the altars; they forcibly circumcised all the uncircumcised boys that they found within the borders of Israel. (1Macc 2:45–46)

Further corroboration is found in Josephus regarding circumcision as necessary for Jewish legal status:

Hyrchanus took also Dora and Marissa, cities of Idumea, and subdued all the Idumeans; and permitted them to stay in that country, if they would circumcise their genitals, and make use of the laws of the Jews; and they were so desirous of living in the country of their forefathers, that they submitted to

the use of circumcision, and the rest of the Jewish ways of living; at which time therefore this befell them, that they were hereafter no other than Jews. (*Antiquities of the Jews* 13.9.1)

Paul is not diminishing nor in any way considering the Torah commandment regarding circumcision to have been abolished when he refers to the “so-called Circumcision.” Once again, he is relating how the Jewish community in general viewed the Gentile “outsiders.” What is more, he is not teaching us here that circumcision has become a “spiritual” rather than a “physical” issue, as though “circumcision of the heart” has replaced “circumcision of the flesh.” Many will point to Rom 2:25–29 to support the view that “circumcision of the flesh” has now been replaced by “circumcision of the heart.”

For indeed circumcision is of value if you practice the Law; but if you are a transgressor of the Law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision. So if the uncircumcised man keeps the requirements of the Law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? And he who is physically uncircumcised, if he keeps the Law, will he not judge you who though having the letter of the Law and circumcision are a transgressor of the Law? For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God. (Rom 2:25–29)

Here are my concluding comments on this passage in Romans.

These verses, taken by themselves, or even misinterpreted by neglecting to understand the wider context of the passage, have often been used to teach that the non-believing Jew has forfeited his status as covenant member, and that the community of believers, the Church, has replaced Israel as God’s covenant people. If these verses stood alone, one might be able to interpret them in this way, but comparing Paul’s teaching in 3:1-4 and especially 9:1-11:36, it is impossible to claim such a position for Paul. He fully recognizes the eternal promises which God has made to physical Israel, and that in fact the fulfillment of these promises yet in the future is the crowning jewel of God’s omnipotence and grace.

What is Paul saying then? First, we should remember that he is addressing the Jewish constituents within the Roman synagogue at this point in the chapter. His reference to the Gentile who keeps the Torah is simply a way to rebuke and

shame the Jews who were insincere in their pursuit of God. Secondly, he is speaking within the sphere of Jewishness, and asserts the same axiom which he speaks plainly in 9:6, namely, that not all physical (outward) descendants of Jacob are actually (inward) Israel. For Paul, it cannot merely be physical lineage which makes a person Jewish—there must be more. If “not every descendant from Israel is Israel” (9:6), who is a descendant of Israel? Paul’s answer is that there must be circumcision of the heart to match the physical circumcision, or there is no value whatsoever in the physical circumcision. Physical lineage has value, even apart from faith, for the descendants of Jacob still comprise the chosen nation of God. What is more, the temporal blessings of the covenant (and these should not be minimized) remain the possession of the nation of Israel, even in their unbelief. But Paul is emphasizing the eternal promises of the covenant (“whose praise is not from men, but from God”), which are the possession only of those who believe and are therefore righteous. These are those who are circumcised both in flesh and in heart (cf. Ezek 44:7-9).

The circumcision of the heart is a Torah concept (cf. Lev 26:41; Deut 10:16; 30:6; Jer 4:4; 9:26), and apart from it the Jewish person fares no better than the pagan before the bar of God’s justice. The circumcision of the flesh, which marks him as a covenant member and therefore the recipient of God’s blessing, apart from the corresponding circumcision of the heart is considered as though he were no covenant member at all (his circumcision has become uncircumcision) in terms of the eternal promises of the covenant.

“By the letter” (in contrast to “by the Spirit”) refers to mere external observance without genuine faith. Isaiah 1 indicates how God looks at such practices.<sup>1</sup>

*...which is performed in the flesh by human hands* – Paul emphasizes that circumcision apart from a genuine faith in God’s promised Messiah, Yeshua, cannot bring about the necessary changes in the life of an unbeliever. Circumcision by human hands can deal with the external cutting of the flesh, but the heart ruled by the sinful flesh can only be worked upon by the Spirit of God.

*remember that you were at that time separate from Messiah* – This is the first of three statements which summarize the plight of the Gentile before

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1 Taken from my commentary, *Paul’s Epistle to the Romans*, 2vols (TorahResource, 2005), 1.57–58.

coming to faith in the Messiah. Paul has already made it clear that both Jew and Gentile were “dead in trespasses and sin” and were all “children of wrath” (2:2–3). Here, however, he is reminding the Gentile believers that they were at a distinct disadvantage because even wayward and unbelieving Israel were still given the prophets and had the very word of God given to them and carried along throughout their generations.

So when Paul writes that they were “at that time separated from Messiah,” it seems clear that he means they were separated from the grand prophecies that promised the coming Messiah and presented the picture of what He would accomplish for all who would be saved. They were unaware of the promise made to Abraham that “in your Seed all the nations of the earth will be blessed” (Gen 12:3) along with the progressive revelation given to the prophets of Israel which pointed to the “coming One” Who would bring the covenant promises of God to completion.

*...excluded from the commonwealth of Israel* – Even wayward Israel always had, in each generation, a remnant that was faithful to God and had genuine faith in the coming Messiah (cf. Rom 9:27; 11:1–6). This remnant in every generation carried the truth of God’s revealed word and lived it out before their brothers and sisters. Such a testimony and witness was a great blessing in the midst of Israel but something with which those from the nations had little if any contact. To be outside of the “commonwealth of Israel,” i.e., the community of the Israelites, was to be at a disadvantage.

*...and strangers to the covenants of promise* – Most of the English translations miss a very important part of this phrase, for the Greek has καὶ ξένοι τῶν διαθηκῶν τῆς ἐπαγγελίας, “and strangers of the covenants of the promise.” Here we understand a central truth of Paul’s theology, and indeed, a central theme of the whole Bible. Walter Kaiser has called this the “Promise Theme” of the Bible. Note carefully that the Greek has the word “covenants” in the plural, and that the word “promise” has the definite article, “*the* promise.” Clearly, “the promise” is that which began in Gen 3:15, given to Chavah, that from her seed would come One Who would crush the head of the enemy, i.e., Satan, the serpent.

And this revelation of “the coming One” was carried along by successive covenants: the Noahic covenant, which guaranteed the continuation of the human race; the Abrahamic covenant, which encapsulated the “Gospel” (Gal 3:8) in God’s promise to bless all the nations; the Mosaic covenant, giving God’s Torah which leads to Messiah (Rom 10:4); the Davidic covenant, which narrowed the promise of Messiah to the line of David; and the New Covenant, which promises the final and

great ingathering of Israel and all who are joined to Israel through faith in the Messiah Yeshua.

Here, in one phrase, Paul shows the utter continuity of God's plan of salvation as prophesied through the divine covenants with Israel, and accomplished by the Promised One.

*having no hope and without God in the world.* – Here Paul concludes his description with a line that encompasses all unbelievers, Jew and Gentile alike. This reiterates what he has taught us in the previous paragraph, and he no doubt brings this as the conclusion of his list in order to show the bounty of God's love and grace to those who are saved.

Now, in the following verses, he will show how Jew and Gentile believers share equally in the body of the Messiah, all being equal recipients of God's sovereign love and grace in Yeshua.