

**September 6, 2009 Ephesians 2:8-10 “A Labor of Love” by Richard Boatman**

<sup>8</sup>For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; <sup>9</sup>not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. <sup>10</sup>For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

There is an engaging theological tension in this passage. We are saved by grace through faith; and that not of ourselves, it is the gift of God. In other words, works or good deeds will not get us to heaven. And yet, we are created for good works. That’s what verse 10 says: “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works...” So, our own human works can never be good enough to merit eternal life; but once we are in Christ Jesus, good works become the normal expression of who we are because of whose we are.

The Goodspeed translation sheds some light on good works: “For he has made us, creating us through our union with Christ for the *life of goodness*.” I like that. This gives us a shift in thinking. Good works are not a part of a heavenly ledger sheet where the good stuff is weighed against the bad stuff and hopefully the good outweighs the bad. That’s how we sometimes think. “Oh, he was such a good person. Why did he have to be taken so young? He deserved better.” That’s a ledger sheet mindset. Rather, through our union with Christ, we are immersed in the life of God so that our daily lives become a manifestation of goodness—a goodness that permeates all we do. Listen to Colossians 3:17: “And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus...” In the name of the Lord Jesus means in his nature.

So in this context, being created for good works is not so much about taking a pie to someone or doing some free labor for a neighbor—as important as those things might be—but daily walking in His nature, living the “life of goodness” so that the sense of God emanates from all we do. Frank Laubach asserted, “The simple program of Christ for winning the whole world is to make each person He touches magnetic enough with love to draw others.”

And this “life of goodness” flows through our giftedness. We need to get that. God has designed us, we might say anointed us, to express his goodness through our particular gifts and graces. This was certainly the case with Bezalel. Exodus 31 tells us that Bezalel was a workman who had been *called of God* to work on the tabernacle. For the Lord had “filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill, ability

and knowledge in all kinds of crafts” (verse 3). This man was heir to no throne. He was not a prestigious priest or destined to be a prophet. He would lead no armies. Bezalel had dirty fingernails and calloused hands. But the Lord’s anointing was upon him to do a work. His work possessed a rhythm of soul as he was given the power of the Spirit to “devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver, and bronze, in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood” (verses 4-5). Bezalel’s “call” was as real as any prophet’s, his work as important as any priest’s or king’s. God’s hand was upon him for a special work. Through his giftedness, he was to live out the “life of goodness,” bringing glory to the Lord through his anointed labors.

I want you to understand this: you have an anointing on your life. And to the degree that you can live your life laboring within that anointing, you will experience a sense of rhythm, a fluidity that is life-giving. Are you always drained? Do you hate what you do? Do you find yourself just longing for weekends or retirement? The cause could simply be issues of attitude or poor choices that create an atmosphere of defeat within you. In other words, you might be doing the right thing but doing it with crippled emotions or mindsets that would permeate anything done. But sometimes the cause is not attitude. Sometimes our being drained and distaining our job is because we’re working outside our anointing.

You’ve heard the saying we’ve got to have the right tool for the right job. Well, our lives are like “tools” that participate in God’s creation. Sometimes we’re the right tool trying do the wrong job. It doesn’t fit. We get frustrated, sapped of creative energy and experience inordinate fatigue because the “tool” of our life is hammering away at the wrong project.

I recently met a man named Marty. Marty is Jewish. He is Vice-President of Chess Club.com. His hobby is cooking. His eight-to-five passion is restoring stained glass windows. That’s the context of my meeting him. A few days ago he showed up at the church and asked if he could get the balcony door unlocked. Within seconds of drawing close to our historic windows, he began describing in enthusiastic detail the style, the vintage and the process of making them new again. I thought, *here’s a guy who loves stained glass windows*. But upon a subsequent visit with Marty my thoughts broadened: *Here’s a man who’s walking in his anointing*. Everything he does—the chess, the culinary work and the stain glass—fits within what he loves. Now to be sure, Marty does it with a creative luster and humor that not everyone would bring to it. That’s his personality. (He had our office staff laughing and on the edge of our seats for about thirty minutes.) But beyond the temperament is a sense of purpose in what he does, a sense that Marty’s giftedness is plugged in to his area of anointing.

Laboring within our anointing does not mean everything is easy, but there is a life-giving quality about it. Growing up, I often admired one of our hometown carpenters. Talk about rhythm—there was a sense of artistry in how he did things with no wasted effort. Like Bezalel, he lived in his anointing. But this same man if called upon to be in front of people and give a talk or lead a discussion would freeze up. You would have thought he was standing before a firing squad. He was anxious, sweaty, clumsy and inarticulate. Why? He stepped outside his giftedness, his anointing. Now, he could have learned to be a better public speaker but probably never a great orator. That's simply not how he best glorified God. The swinging hammer was his instrument of praise. He could not understand how I could work for him all summer and still not feel that fluidity, that oneness with the craft. I could not understand why he struggled so with words and transitional statements. I have loved words since I was a child, how they fit on the page, how their sounds roll from the tongue, the power they have to express ideas and to influence. We have different anointings in which we walk.

That's what Ephesians 2:10 implies: "Prepared beforehand [by God] so that we would walk in them." We *walk* in our anointing, our giftedness. There is a pervasive attitude I find in those who have come to know their giftedness and who walk in the anointing of God's Spirit, expressing this "life of goodness." It is an attitude of humility, ownership and confidence.

An attitude of humility does not mean that we always walk with our heads down, sort of muttering all the time, "Oh, I could never do that." Often that's not humility at all. The ten spies who refused to take the Promised Land because the people there were too great were not being humble but rebellious. Andrew Murray calls humility "the first duty and the highest virtue of a person." He defines humility as "the place of entire dependence on God." Humility is that quality of being grounded and teachable, pliable and responsive to the Creator's call. Those who know their anointing—like my dad used to say about playing the trumpet, "You've got to know your instrument"—are humble before God. They know who butters their bread; they know who gave the gift.

But just as importantly, those who walk in their anointing possess an attitude of ownership, a sense that God has given this gift to express Him, so we must take care of it. These persons know God has given something special to steward, that is, to cultivate and fine tune and guard. Whitney Houston recently made a come back. And I've got to tell you, I celebrate it. She made some poor choices and did some silly things. But she has a God-given gift. There are few voices that really move

me. She possesses one of them. My daughter Mandy played me her new song she now sings to God: *I Look to You*. I got tears in my eyes. I believe she had a anointing that she squandered, she did not guard it. But God is the God of the second chance. I pray she takes ownership and better stewards her anointing. If you have the gift of hospitality, own it as a way that God works through you. So many with this gift think it's nothing, that any one can do it. But not everyone can. Not everyone possesses the gift of creating havens of rest making people feel special and welcomed and accepted. Take ownership of this gift, laboring over it in prayer.

And finally, those walking in their anointing possess confidence. Confidence is not arrogance. Confidence is a sense of certainty, assurance and a belief in one's God-given ability. When Coach Randy comes over to work at the parsonage, he sees what needs to be done, knows the tools needed, and does it. Larae and I have never thought, "Man, did you hear that? What arrogance. He looked at that roof and said, 'Yeah, I can do that.' Oh, what pride!" No. He's confident because he's gifted; he knows how to build houses. Shawn Johnson has confidence on the balance beam, not because she's arrogant but because she's practiced countless hours in obedience to her call, her anointing.

Jesus said to a fledgling group, a motley crew of twelve disciples: "Go into all the world and preach the gospel, teaching all nations and making disciples..." Arrogance? No. Confidence. He knew what had been accomplished. And he knew what could be accomplished through men and women filled with the Holy Spirit whose prime directive and focused motivation was to use their gifts to reclaim this planet for Almighty God.

You see, that's the labor of love into which all as believers enter. Whether you're a Bezalel or Billy Graham, whether you're a Martha or Mary, we are called into a labor of love. We express our love to God differently through various gifts and anointings. But taken all together, we are one body, the body of Christ.

Regarding communion, Paul told the Corinthians that some of the members are sick and even die prematurely because they do not "discern the body rightly" (1 Cor. 11:29). This may mean two things. First, they did not discern the incredible price Jesus Christ paid for us, his bloody carnage at Calvary being the culmination of centuries of animal sacrifice to atone for sin. Second, they did not treat with respect his body—the Church. By speaking negatively of others, excluding the marginalized, etc. they crippled and suffocated their own souls. You are sitting beside someone who is anointed for service. Your personalities may be different, your methods may vary. But there is a gift beside you. Let us break bread together.