

Living to Serve

We know and believe that we are saved by God's grace grasped in faith, not by our works, so no patting ourselves on the back. Ephesians 2:8–9 says so. It's a great joy and relief knowing that our salvation is not up to us. We could work and work and never find the end. Instead, Jesus Christ has paid the price and made us one with God.

But when we think of our new life in Christ, don't stop with verse 9. Read on to verse 10: We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works that God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. Saved from sin also means saved for service, doing works called good because they are done by people made good by God's grace. Good fruit coming because of a good tree is the way Jesus pictured it.

So service comes naturally from faith. Martin Luther put it another way in a famous pair of sentences:

1. The Christian is the perfectly free lord of all, subject to none.
2. The Christian is the servant of all, subject to all.

The first sentence speaks of our salvation: since Christ has freed us, no one can burden us with something to do to be saved. But because we *are* saved, we turn right around and serve the people around us. Being saved by Christ's grace means we now have a lot of time freed up to find ways to serve others.

We serve God by serving for him in his place. How so? God gives us all sorts of "callings" in life—"vocations" in theological talk from the days when theologians spoke Latin. "Vocatio" = "Calling." That's not just a job, how someone makes a living. Vocations are all sorts of roles people fill in daily life. Ever since God created this world, both before and after the fall into sin, he has had people doing things to take care of his world and make things run. Adam and Eve had callings: care for Eden, care for each other, and care for the family they started—really the start of society as people multiplied.

Service in vocations has continued ever since. Think of the Small Catechism explanations to the commandments, where we read not only of what God's people don't do, but also how they help others. It's not that God couldn't do things directly himself. He could reach down and teach

a class, but he uses teachers. He could build a building, but he uses construction workers. He could plow the field, but he uses farmers. He could manage a home, but he uses homemakers. He could help around the house, befriend older people, walk the dog, baby sit, and more, but he uses kids. Yes, you have vocations, too. The Bible does not say much about Jesus' childhood, but we know that as he grew up, he found approval in the eyes of God and people—he filled all the vocations that fell to him along the way.

We like to say God works through means. The Means of Grace are his Word spoken, read, and heard, as well as his Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. These Sacraments also give us his promise of salvation. In matters of daily life, God also works through means to get things done, through people he puts in different roles. Some of the many examples have already been mentioned.

But there are other means that are important because they also help communicate the Means of Grace. We are talking about vocations within the church. Here, too, God uses people to work for him, to communicate his message of sin and grace. So Christ gave us the role, or office, of pastor to preach and teach, to carry out the Sacraments in behalf of Christ's people—in short, to make sure we know that while we are sinners, we also have God's eternal forgiving love in Christ—and to remind us of verse 10 in Ephesians 2. In and since New Testament times, the church has found it useful to set up other roles, or callings, to work with pastors, to extend God's work through teachers, deacons and deaconesses, evangelists, and more. These serve as God's hands and do his work now in this world and for the eternal good of those they serve, teaching and telling and showing Christ's love.

“For all which it is our duty to thank and praise, to serve and obey him,” says the Small Catechism on the First Article of the Apostles Creed. Vocation is service. Think about that when doing life's tasks great and small. And think about service also in the church, in vocations there to build up the body of Christ. But whether with deeds or with words witnessing to what God has done for me, we know that for his children, vocation is thanks and praise. This is most certainly true!

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