



Re-created in Baptism

Brownsburg Church of Christ

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Introduction:

According to **Ephesians 2:8-10**, we are God's workmanship. We have been created in Jesus Christ to walk in God's good works. I know we want to be this creation. We want to be God's workmanship. So, how do we sign up for this? How do we get in? **II Corinthians 5:17** explains that if anyone is in Christ, He is a new creation. If we want to be God's creation we must be in Christ. **Galatians 3:27** makes it completely clear how we get into Christ, saying, "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (ESV). Certainly, there is a sense in which being God's workmanship means God's creative work is continuing in us as we grow in Christ. But there is a moment God has chosen as the initiation into Christ. There is a point at which we become a new creature. That point is baptism for the remission of our sins (**Acts 2:38**). We are baptized into Christ, and in Christ we are new creatures, God's workmanship. But this leaves us with a quandary. In **Ephesians 2:8-10**, Paul said none of this happened because of our work, therefore we cannot boast. How can he say both that this new creation is not because of our work, but elsewhere say the new creation happens when we are baptized? Is he contradicting himself? Is he wrong? How can we be re-created in baptism, but it not be because of our work?

Discussion:

I. Whose work delivered us?

- A. Remember what we have learned in previous lessons about this idea of boasting. God gave us a great object lesson in Gideon's army of 300 in **Judges 7:2**. He said that an army of 32,000 was way too many to give them the victory because they might think they had somehow delivered themselves from the Midianites. God whittled the army down to the ridiculously low number of 300 so the Israelites couldn't possibly think they had done the delivering. Did the Israelites have to do anything? Of course they did. **Judges 7:15-18** shows the plan. If the Israelites hadn't done this, they wouldn't have been delivered. But when they got done blowing their trumpets and smashing their jars, did anyone think the Israelites had defeated Midian? Absolutely not. They all knew that God's work had done the delivering.
- B. Consider the flood of Noah's day, an Old Testament parallel to baptism.
 1. In **I Peter 3:20-21**, Peter relates the waters of baptism to the waters of the flood. The waters of the flood cleansed the unrighteousness from the earth, saving Noah from the unrighteous generation he lived in (cf. **Acts 2:40**). Please understand that the parallel in this passage is not between baptism and the ark, but between the water of baptism and the water of the flood. It wasn't the ark that saved Noah from his perverse generation, it was the flood that did that.
 2. Consider a powerful picture for a moment in **Psalms 104:6-9**. At first blush and in the context of the psalm, this seems like it is talking about the creation when God called the waters that were covering all of the earth to gather into certain places and the dry land appeared (**Genesis 1:9-10**). However, notice **Psalms 104:9**. "You set a boundary that they may not pass, so that they might not again cover the earth" (ESV). That didn't happen until after the flood in Noah's day (cf. **Genesis 9:11**). Please grasp the picture. The earth was created in that first week as God commanded the flood of waters to subside and gather into boundaries. But there was a re-creation during Noah's flood when God again brought the waters to cover even the mountain tops. By this covering, He cleansed the earth of unrighteousness. He essentially baptized the earth. Then He commanded the waters to recede and they fled from before Him. He has now put a boundary on them that they will never again cover all the earth.
 3. Did Noah have to do some work? Of course he did. But when it was all said and done, whose work really delivered Noah from the perverse generation? When all was said and done and Noah was relaxing on a newly dried earth after a hard day of planting vineyards, did he turn to God and talk about what a mighty thing it was that he built the ark, or did he praise God for the mighty flood and the command to make the waters recede? Think of all the work God did in this deliverance. Do you think Noah travelled all over the world to gather animals, or do you think God worked in that? Do you think Noah kept the ark together when it was crashing around amid the waves of the storm, or do you think it was God who did that? Do you think it was Noah who kept the animals calm on that boat, or do you think it was God who did that? Whose work really delivered Noah and his family? God's work did. Noah couldn't boast.

- C. Consider the Red Sea crossing of the Israelites, another Old Testament parallel to baptism.
 - 1. In **I Corinthians 10:1-2**, Paul related the Israelites passing through the Red Sea with baptism. His point was that just as we are baptized into Christ, they walked through the Red Sea. Their walking through the Red Sea at the command of Moses prefigures our baptism at the command of Jesus. You know the story of the Red Sea crossing (**Exodus 14**). Egypt's army was bearing down on them. God was keeping them at bay with the pillar of cloud. But then Moses lifted his hands and God parted the Red Sea. The Israelites passed through on dry ground. When the Egyptians charged forward, God let the waters come crashing down and destroyed them.
 - 2. Did the Israelites do something? Of course they did. They walked through the Red Sea. If they hadn't walked through the Red Sea, they would not have been saved. But whose work delivered them? Their own? No, it was God's. In **Exodus 15**, when Moses and the people sang to God, did they sing about all their work in walking through the Red Sea? No they sang about God's might and power in piling up the waters and bringing them back down. They sang of God's destruction of the enemy. They sang of God's leadership and guidance. Could they boast in themselves about that deliverance? No.
- D. We could talk about the bronze serpent of **Numbers 21**. We could talk about Israel crossing the Jordan in **Joshua 3**. We could talk about Israel marching around Jericho in **Joshua 6**. We could talk about Naaman dipping in the Jordan in **II Kings 5**. We could go on and on looking at deliverance, healing. And victory throughout both Old and New Testaments. Again and again and again we see that while people did things in accord with God's will, it was God's working that delivered, healed, and gave victory, not man's. No one could boast in themselves. God always made it abundantly clear that there was nothing in the working of the people that warranted or accomplished the deliverance, healing, or victory. God's work did that.
- E. The same is true of baptism. Must we do something? Of course, we must be baptized. But is there anything remotely powerful about having someone dunk us under the water that causes any of us to think that salvation came about because we did such an awesome task? Of course not. Boasting that we somehow accomplished our salvation in baptism would be like Gideon's 300 going home to boast about how they delivered Israel from Midian. That would be silly. And thus, **Colossians 2:12** sets the record straight. Baptism does not save us because we accomplished such a powerful work by doing it. Rather, baptism saves us because God powerfully works in baptism. Whose work does the delivering? God's work. Not ours. Must we be baptized for the remission of our sins? Of course. When we've been baptized, can we boast? Of course not. It is God's work in baptism that did the delivering, not ours.

II. What work did God do in our baptism?

- A. If just looking at the above parallels didn't drive home the point that we can't go around boasting about our work of baptism, but rather we need to glorify God for His work of saving us through baptism, Paul breaks down exactly what work God did in our baptism in **Colossians 2:8-15**. Hopefully, by the time we are done looking at this, those who have not been baptized will no longer delay, but long for God to powerfully work in their lives this way. Hopefully, by the time we are done looking at this, those who have been baptized will not boast in how awesome they are for being baptized and instead boast in the glorious God and His mighty work in our baptisms.
- B. *God filled us in Christ (vs. 10)*: When we were baptized into Christ, God filled us with the fullness of Him (cf. **Ephesians 3:19**). Just as Jesus Christ was the fullness of God, we are filled with God. He dwells with us and in us. No doubt, there is some confusion about this statement, and I'm not sure I fully grasp all that it means. But what I am certain of is that this statement means everything we need for spiritual growth, for eternal salvation, for spiritual victory is found in Christ and is found with Christ in us. God accomplished that in our baptism. Whose work did that? Ours? No, it was God's!
- C. *God circumcised us, putting off the body of the flesh (vs. 11)*: The Jews boasted in their circumcision made with hands. They could look at a work they accomplished. But that circumcision did them no lasting good. That circumcision did not help them overcome sin (cf. **Romans 2:25-26**). In their circumcision, they removed a small amount of flesh, but when God circumcised us in Christ, He removed the whole body of flesh. Not that He separates us from our physical bodies, but He separates us from the captivity to which our fleshly pursuits had led us. In baptism, God sets us free by the work of Jesus on the cross from our guilt and shame. We are set free to walk by the Spirit and bear His fruit rather than continuing in the works of the flesh (cf. **Galatians 5:16-23**). No doubt, as **Colossians 3:5-11** will explain, we must live like free people who have undergone this circumcision. If we don't, then we will once again reap corruption (**Galatians 6:8**). But it is God who did the circumcising who makes that possible. Whose work did that? Ours? No, it was God's!

- D. *God raised us up and made us alive (vss. 12, 13)*: This point is so powerful, Paul makes it twice. God raised us up through baptism, just like He raised Jesus up. As Paul said in **Romans 6:4**, we have been raised by God to walk in newness of life. Saying something parallel to **Ephesians 2:1-6**, Paul points out that even though we were dead in our trespasses and sins, God made us alive with Christ. But even more than that, He raised us up to sit with Christ in heavenly places that are far above every rule and authority. Whose work did that? Ours? No, it was God's!
- E. *Forgiven us all our trespasses (vs. 13)*. God did this raising through forgiveness. If you want to see what a powerful work this is, read **Psalm 103:10-14**. God did that with our sins. We are but dust. Do you think we could accomplish that with our sins? Do you think we could toss them aside and force God not to deal with us according to them? No way. But in baptism, our sins are tossed away. Whose work did that? Ours? No, it was God's!
- F. *God cancelled our record of debt by nailing it to the cross (vs. 14)*: In **Matthew 6:12**, Jesus likens our sins to debts. When we violate God's law, we incur a debt against Him. We owe Him. Here in **Colossians 2:14**, Paul provides a wonderful word picture. Because paper was scarce, when a debt was recorded and then paid, they didn't tear it up, throw it away, or burn it. Rather, they would scrape the ink off the papyrus or vellum so it could be reused. They canceled out or blotted out the certificate of debt. That is what Jesus did with the record of our debt. But this is more than simply cleansing our personal record. This debt record consists of decrees against us, parallel to the "law of commandments expressed in ordinances" of **Ephesians 2:15**. Jesus nailed those decrees and ordinances to the cross. That is, when He was nailed to the cross in our place and as our sacrifice, the Law that condemns us was nailed to the cross. Our debt was paid, cancelled out, blotted out. Whose work did that? Ours? No, it was God's!
- G. *God defeated the rulers and authorities (vs. 15)*: Perhaps this is the most powerful point of all. **Ephesians 6:12** says we aren't fighting "against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places" (ESV). Wow! Do we remotely think we can beat them? Of course not. But we don't have to. God has already done that in the death of Jesus on the cross and His resurrection. And when we were baptized into Christ, we became part of that victory. In our baptism, God has disarmed them against us. They can't beat us, if we'll only rely on God. Paul provides a wonderful picture. When Romans defeated an army, they brought back their prisoners and led them in procession through the city of Rome. They put them at the end of the line because that meant they were walking through all the excrement and refuse of the horses carrying the Roman generals at the front of the line. They were led in shame. God has already done that with our spiritual enemies. Whose work did that? Ours? No, it was God's!
- H. When we are baptized, that is what God does. Now, let me ask you this. Can any one of us sit back and boast in what awesome work we did by being baptized? No way. Must we be baptized? Of course (cf. **Acts 2:38**). Can we be saved without it? Of course not (cf. **John 3:3, 5**). But whose work does the delivering? Our work of being baptized? Or God's work that He accomplishes in our baptism? Gideon's army couldn't boast about its work when Midian was defeated. Noah couldn't boast about his work when the flood subsided. Israel couldn't boast about their work when the Red Sea came crashing down. Why would we ever boast about our work when we get baptized?

Conclusion:

We are God's workmanship. We are created to walk in good works. He is fashioning us and molding us into a habitable dwelling place for the living Spirit. That creative work begins in baptism. God's powerful working raises us up. Have you been baptized with faith in His powerful working? If not, can we help you with that today?