

“The God-Canvass”

Presentation Handout

The Family “Mike”

- It couldn't be. It must just be family lore—a tall tale passed on from generation to generation. That's what many of the Kober family members mostly thought.
- To the family's surprise “The Mike” painting stored safely behind their living room sofa was a Michelangelo original 16th century painting called the *Ragusa Pieta* worth an estimated \$300 million.
- Despite its exorbitant worth, the real value is not in the canvass or the painting itself, but in who the artist is—the famed Michelangelo!
- We're not a Michelangelo original, but we are a God original—the handiwork, the “canvass” of God's creation. This is what Paul means when he says, “For we are His (God's) workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” *{Ephesians 2:10, NKJV – version used throughout}*.

The Salvation-Faith Overview

- Somebody may say, “Wait! I thought faith was belief and we're saved by grace through faith, it's a gift. It is! So how can works (good deeds/obedience) be involved? Isn't that legalism? I can't earn God's love, mercy, or grace. True, we can't!! But neither are works or obedience legalism—a “works-trip” to earn God's love, grace, mercy, or salvation!
- Here's the question to be answered: is it **faith and works**, faith against works (opposing opposites) or is it a **faith that works by love**?
- The great Protestant reformer, Martin Luther, struggled with this same issue, as he called the book of James the “straw epistle” because he felt it overemphasized works against or over faith—that somehow one's standing with God was based on their performance, good deeds, obedience.
- How is someone saved—a review
 - Naturally as human being we are sinful—born in sin, dead in trespasses and sins, hopeless *{Ephesian 2:1, 5a}*.
 - Because humans have sinful natures they naturally live sinful lives, make sinful choices, in opposition to God's perfect character and will *{Ephesian 2:2-3}*.
 - In love, mercy, and grace, God initiated salvation for all of humanity, not because of their persuading or convincing *{Ephesians 2:4-9}*.
 - Some humans when they realize and appreciate God's love, mercy, and grace for them, receive His gift of salvation through faith *{Ephesians 2:8}*. Faith is the means, the channel, for how someone receives God's salvation, not a merit that earns it.
 - Here's a more literal translation adapted from *Wuest's Word Studies from Greek NT*: “For by the grace you have been saved completely in the past, through faith, with

you continuing to live in this salvation in the present. You did not produce this salvation. It is God's gift, not because of your good deeds or works, so that no one could boast for we are His (God's) handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to live a life of good works, which God prepared before which should influence our behavior."

- Yet, we still have *Ephesians 2:10*, where for some, Paul seems to contradict what he just said in *Ephesians 2:4-9*. Is Paul confused or are we, like Martin Luther, confused on the relationship between God's grace, faith, and obedience? Is it *faith and works* or a *faith that works*?

God's Canvass/Workmanship

- The confusion, I believe, lies with the source and motive for our works (obedience), not whether there should be works (obedience).
 - Here is where it seems Luther struggled (and so have many others). We must remember Luther was molded by the medieval Catholic Church's belief in a merited grace system through the Church and/or good works. In other words: God's work in humans flowed from their works. This is why he made a pilgrimage to Rome and climbed up the *Scala Sancta*, the "holy stairs." The Church taught by ascending these steps on one's knees in an appropriate fashion, reciting "Our Father," one could release a soul from purgatory—salvation, merit by one's works or obedience. Someone can do this with their worship style, health habits, dress, theology, etc.
- But this is not Paul's theology, here in *Ephesians 2*, or anywhere else in his epistles, nor in rest of the Bible.
- Here's Paul's theology instead: "Good works (obedience) flow from what God does in us, rather than God's work in us flowing from our works" *{IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament}*.
- Paul is not saying in *Ephesians 2:8-10*, works (obedience) are not important, they are not meritorious to earn God's love, mercy, grace, or salvation. And neither is our faith. Instead, our works are a gift from God, supplied and empowered by God, just like His love, grace, mercy, and salvation are—a faith that works by God's love!
- In other words, our works (obedience) are a fruit of our salvation in Christ Jesus that occur through faith in God as a gift from Him.
- *Ephesians 2:10*—meaning of key words:
 - "**workmanship**" (NT: 4161) – something made, handiwork, workpiece *{Complete Word Study Dictionary: NT}*.
 - This is like a pottery piece created by an artist, or the "Mike"—the Michelangelo painting—the Kober family had stored behind their sofa all those years.
 - As a masterpiece does not create itself, so we don't produce good works (obedience) on our own and/or to merit God's love, grace, or salvation. This is why we can't boast of what we do, we didn't do them through our own human strength *{Ephesians 2:9}*.
 - "**created**" (NT:2936) – to create and form in a spiritual sense, regeneration or renewal, implied from nothing like God did with physical creation *{Complete Word Study Dictionary: NT}*.

- Just like God is the Creator who only can create something from nothing in our physical world, He is the only one who can create good works (obedience) of righteousness since He is the only One who is righteous. We are not!
- This is the New Covenant, whether in the Old Testament or New Testament. This is how God has operated from the beginning {*Psalm 51:10; Philippians 2:13*}.
- This is the only way works (obedience) occur or happen in one's life. True, biblical faith in Christ Jesus leads to obedience—faith working through love {*Galatians 5:6*}.
- “in” (NT:1722) – in, on, at, by any place or thing, with the primary idea of rest {*Complete Word Study Dictionary: NT*}.
 - Unless we're spiritually resting *in* Jesus *in* God's love, grace, mercy, and salvation by faith we will not live out the life (workmanship) God has for us. We will not experience God's best for our lives.
 - And these perfect works (obedience) of righteousness were created *in* Jesus *in* humanity through His faith *in* the Father (in Christ motif).
 - This is the New Covenant teaching of how works (obedience) occur in the Christian/believer's life—in God's power through faith in Jesus {*Colossians 2:9-11; Ezekiel 36:26-27*}.
- “for” (NT:1909) – motion upon, to, towards {*Complete Word Study Dictionary: NT*}.
 - We were redeemed in Christ unto or for good works (obedience)—a life of growth in Jesus that glorifies the Father.
 - In the Old Testament God redeemed Israel before He gave them the commandments {*Exodus 20:2-3; Deuteronomy 5:6-7*} which should have led to good works (obedience) flowing out of appreciation of His grace, even if Israel (like many people today) did not always grasp that point {*Deuteronomy 5:29; 30:6, 11-14*} {*IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*}.
- “prepared” (NT: 4282) – prepare ahead or before—based on two words, meaning “before” and “make ready” {*Complete Word Study Dictionary: NT*}.
 - This workmanship—life of obedience, growing in Jesus' likeness—was prepared before our salvation, as already mentioned, in Christ while on this earth in humanity as He lived by faith in His Father's power, strength.
 - This is why one reads multiple promises from God the Father to the Servant (Jesus) in Isaiah {*Isaiah 42:1, 5-7; 49:1-3, 5-6, 8; 50:4-5, 7-9; 61:1-3*}. They were working out, preparing ahead, in this covenant of peace the plan of salvation with its life of radical obedience for us to walk in, life out in Christ {*1 Peter 2:21, 24; 1 John 1:7; 2:6*}.

The Life of Abraham—Faith that Worked

- Justification by faith is an active, growing, obeying process by faith in Christ Jesus, not just a cerebral/mental ascent to truth. It leads one to obey from the heart, establishing God's law in one's life {*Romans 3:27-31; 4:17-21; 6:1-2*}.
- Circumcision was a sign of obedience by Abraham through faith—a sign of righteousness by faith, not a meritorious means to earn God's favor or acceptance {*Romans 4:11; Genesis 17:1-7, 10-11, 26*}
 - Abraham, Ishmael, and all of the other males in his household were circumcised in the flesh of their foreskin. This location is important because it was a consistent

remember to Abraham & Sarah regarding the failed, mixed-up attempt to help God out by trying to “fulfill” His (God’s) promise of a son.

- Yet, trusting God was a “work” (obedience)—the waiting was a “work!” It takes two for a baby, whether asexual or sexual reproduction. No immaculate conception here. You get my point. Abraham & Sarah trusted God, stepping out in obedience on God’s Word of promise as though it already had happened
- In *Genesis 22*, Abraham trusted and obeyed God, taking Him (God) at His Word, even if it meant God would have to resurrect Isaac from the dead *{Hebrews 11:17-19}*. Abraham trusted God in heart-obedience to work out the apparent dichotomy between God’s promise of Isaac being the promised child and God’s invitation-command to sacrifice him as an offering.
- This theme of true faith working/obeying is picked up by other Bible writers too:
 - Mary Magdalene washed Jesus’ feet with her hair, tears, and expensive spikenard worth a whole year’s salary . Why because God’s love through Jesus captured her heart and nothing was too much for her Lord *{Luke 7:40-50}*. Notice Jesus said, “Your faith has saved you. Go in peace” *{v.50}*!
 - God’s love produces, motivates true heart obedience, not the motive of fear or reward *{John 14:15 (NIV), 23; 2 Corinthians 5:7, 14-15; Hebrews 11:4-40}*.
 - Though works don’t earn God’s love, care, or salvation; they can reveal heart appreciation and true faith because true faith works, motivated by God’s love *{James 2:14-24}*.
 - True faith grows, matures, learns, lives out God’s life, etc. *{2 Corinthians 8:7; 10:15; 13:5; Galatians 2:20; 3:1-3; Ephesians 6:10-11, 16; Philippians 1:25; Colossians 1:21-23; 2:5-7, 11-13; 1 Thessalonians 1:2-10; 5:4-10; 2 Thessalonians 1:3-4, 11-12; 1 Timothy 1:4-5, 14, 18-19; 4:6, 12; 6:11-12; 2 Timothy 1:13-14; 2:22-25; 3:10-17; 4:7; Titus 2:1-2; Philemon 5-6; Hebrews 6:11-12; 2 Peter 1:5-11; 1 John 5:4}*.
- All these Scriptures are a description of saving faith—the faith Abraham & Sarah had, the faith Paul had, the faith John had, and the faith that you and I can have too!!

LIVING CHOICE: Will you trust God in faith, walking in His workmanship/lifestyle for your life, bringing glory to His name through your heart obedience/good works?