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## Lent 4 • Ephesians 2:1–10 • March 15, 2015

Wally Becker

*Concordia Seminary, St. Louis*, [BeckerW@csl.edu](mailto:BeckerW@csl.edu)

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We are saved by God’s grace, through faith in Christ Jesus, for the purpose of living as God’s people to this world which he loves (Jn 3:16). This passage gives us a picture of “the two kinds of righteousness.”

The first portion of the text focuses on the grace of God: dead in sin, made alive in Christ, because of his great mercy. It is by grace that you are saved. This is the first kind of righteousness, the passive righteousness, received from God, the righteousness of Jesus given to us (2 Cor 5:21) in exchange for our sins. It is all God’s doing, God’s giving—God’s choosing of us that goes back even before creation and the beginning of time (Eph 1:4). This is the righteousness that defines our relationship before God, and because it is all God’s doing and his giving, we can rest assured in his word and promises, secure in our salvation and the promise of everlasting life, because it does not depend on us and our good works, but it depends entirely on Jesus and what he has done for us.

It is through faith in Jesus that we receive all his gifts and blessing, this new life from God, this first kind of righteousness. Faith has many facets as described in scripture: believing in Jesus, relationship of trust like a little child trusting his/her parents, believing is seeing (Heb 11:1), but the thrust of Ephesians 2 is that faith is a gift from God, not a good work that we do. It is also God’s action, the Holy Spirit’s work in us through the word. We have nothing to boast about in ourselves. We had nothing to do with our physical birth. Likewise we had nothing to do with our spiritual birth. We were born from above by water and the spirit (Jn 3).

Too often when we quote from Ephesians 2 we stop at verse 9, but the Apostle Paul goes on to instruct us about the second kind of righteousness, the active righteousness that is still God's work in us, his work of art or workmanship. This active righteousness is the good works that he wants us to do, that he has prepared in advance for us to do. Good works are not necessary for our salvation. They do not define our relationship before God. But they are necessary in our lives for the good of our neighbor, and they describe our relationship before our neighbor. God is at work in this world, to love the world, through us, as we love one another.

What does that look like? Consider the law written on our hearts, summed up in the Ten Commandments. Luther's explanation to each commandment, especially the second table of the law which describes our relationship to our neighbor, not only says what we are not to do, but also states what we are to do: how we are to treat our neighbor and look out for his/her interests.

What does this look like? Paul goes on in Ephesians 5 to encourage us to be imitators of God as dearly loved children, to live lives of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us. We desire to be more and more like Jesus. Jesus lives his life in us and through us (Gal 2:20). Someone has said that we are to be Jesus's love with skin on it.

Paul goes on in Ephesians 5 and 6 to describe how this work of art that God is doing in our lives, the good works that he has planned in advance for us to do, shows itself in our relationships: husband and wife, children and parents, employee and employer. It is reflected in our vocations as we relate to one another in our families, our work, our civic responsibilities, and our congregational life (see also Luther: Table of Duties).

Secure in our relationship with God (by grace through faith – first kind of righteousness) we are empowered by God to live as God's people in this world, loving God, by loving our neighbor (Mt 22:37–40), using all that God has given us to serve him, as we find him in our neighbors (Mt 25:40) as the "Masks of God" (Luther).