

“Works” twice subverted: An explication of Ephesians 2:9,10¹

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Abstract

The application of the grace-works dichotomy as found in Paul’s writings (Rm. 11: 4-6; Eph. 2:8-10; 2 Tm.1: 9-11 and Tt 3:4-7) is both a cornerstone of the Christian life and one of its greatest challenges. Therefore, it is important to revisit the notion in some detail. This paper seeks to do so in two ways. First, it considers the broader context of Eph.2:8-10 and demonstrates the force of this passage in the cognitive and emotional flow of the letter the letter as a whole. Secondly, it seeks to explicate vs 9 and 10 because these verses contain a particularly rapid movement of ideas from useless ‘works’, to ‘God’s workmanship’ to ‘good works’ in which the original dichotomy is undermined. The emphases on placing this passage within the cognitive and emotional flow of Ephesians as well as that of the rapid transformation of the notion of “works” in Eph. 2: 9,10 are not common in the literature. The result should lead to a greater understanding of how ‘works’ are doubly subverted by God’s work in the life of believers. This subversion needs not only to be understood but needs to be appropriated by God’s people in order to live authentic Christian lives.