

Ephesians 2:1-10
Our Vows: Service
Sunday October 29th, 2017

Today is the 3rd in our series on our Membership vows as part of our Consecration Sunday Stewardship program. We are looking at our membership vows as part of the stewardship God has given us here on earth.

I enjoy and affirm the theology of this program, because it is based on the need of the giver to give, not the church to receive. No budget is created until after the pledges are received and estimates made. We're not asking you to buy a church program, but to give your best to God and the experience of the Church down through the ages is that when believers give their best the Church thrives.

There are certain areas of our lives that if we give the best of ourselves, our all to God, we as individuals thrive and prosper, and so does the Church. These areas are summarized in our membership vows of: prayer, presence, gifts, service and witness.

These are the areas that Jesus lifted up as the most important in loving God in the Great Commandment. I Began this series by showing how deeply Biblical, and important to Jesus are our membership vows, which you can see summarized in the following chart.

“Love the Lord your God with”

	Connected to	
<u>All your heart</u>	>	Witness
<u>All your mind</u>	>	Prayers
<u>All your soul</u>	>	Presence
<u>All your strength</u>	>	Gifts
Love your neighbor.	>	Service

Today, we are addressing “Loving our Neighbor as ourselves,” which is “service.”

The main focus of my message today is the Ephesians passage that was just read, but I want to start with the reading from John.

Receiving Jesus as the way of salvation, believing in him is a gift. It is a gift of God's grace. It doesn't matter how good or bad we are, or what we do or don't do. What matters is what God does, and as it says, **"God gave, gave, gave his Son!!!!"** For even our ability to believe in Jesus is a gift of God's grace.



Now, that strange reference to Moses lifting up a serpent in the wilderness; do you know that strange story? The Israelites in the wilderness were being bitten up by snakes and dying. God told Moses to put a bronze snake (which was a cursed animal) on a stick and lift it up. Any who looked up to the snake and believed that God would save them;... God would save them from the snake bites.



In the same way Jesus was saying he would be cursed and lifted up on a cross and anyone who looks up to him and believes in him will be saved. That was his purpose, his walk, a walk of sorrows to absolute victory.

And the word for "lifted up" has a double meaning. It also means "exalted." So to speak of Jesus Christ as being lifted up on the cross speaks of his ascending into heaven. When we look up to Jesus on the cross and look up to him in heaven and believe; we are **"born again from above!"**

***"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son,
so that whosoever believes in him may not perish but have eternal life."***

The point of John 3:17-21 is that we judge ourselves by our belief in Jesus Christ. If we believe, then we enter the Kingdom of God. If we refuse to believe, we judge ourselves and God merely ratifies the judgment we have made. The light has shown in the darkness and we have refused to see. We have chosen the darkness instead.

Both our scriptures today have good news and bad news. John 3:16 which I just quoted is the Gospel, the good news in miniature. All you have to do is believe and you will be saved. The bad news is in verse 18, **“but those who do not believe are condemned already,..”**

In the Ephesians passage it starts out with the bad news. It tells it like it is for us before we met Jesus. We were dead in our trespasses and sins, we followed the ruler of the air, satan, and we simply lived by our passions and desires. We did whatever we wanted to do.

The Good News, the Gospel here is that God’s grace has never abandoned us despite how far we have strayed! Verses 4-6 say, **“But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which**

he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive

together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him

and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.”

Not only has Christ been lifted up into heaven, but we also have been lifted up with him into heaven the moment we believe. **The moment we believe our eternal life begins.**

And the Good News gets even better for verse 10 says, **“For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good**

works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.” We are called and gifted for a purpose! We are called and gifted to serve.

One way verse 10 is also translated is that “we are created in Christ Jesus to do good works that God prepared beforehand for us to walk in them.” There is an obvious sense of predestination here. God predestines us for good, good works not for evil. And as we walk the path of life God has laid out for us we will find the good works to do along the way. It is in those good works we find our purpose.

Now many of all ages search for a purpose. This is not just a quest for young people. Ron Bartlow who is now a pastor told me this when he was 17, “The reason adults are always asking us what we want to be when we grow up is that they are looking for a few good ideas!”

Many young moms clearly see their good purpose in life as being a fulltime mother to their children. That is their good work: their Vocation! That is what my daughter Amy is doing having transitioned from a career as an adjunct professor at the U of A teaching English as a second language to a career as a fulltime mom of Ivy and Roman. But even being a fulltime mom is a purpose that passes with time, because of course they grow up.

As we walk the way of Christ in the unfolding journey of life we transition from one purpose to another, one good work to another.

My transition to being a head pastor was an odd transition for me. I had worked for 24 years as a Youth and Christian Education Pastor and expect to do that until I retired. I had spent over 1000 Sunday nights at Youth Fellowship, and then that was no more. I was lost and restless on Sunday nights for many years always thinking I needed to be somewhere else, and thinking I wasn't doing something I should be doing. But that was a good work God had chosen for me to no longer walk in.

It's times like these, the transitions in life, that what we need to be doing is resting and letting God direct us. In the spiritual life we don't work, work, work and then rest. We rest, and then it is out of our rest and abiding with Jesus that we work and serve others.

God built this into the fabric of creation and into our very inner being from the beginning.

After God created the heavens, and the earth, and human beings, he didn't send human beings directly to work taking care of the garden. The first thing God did was rest. The first thing God required of human beings was to rest. It was out of their rest they then began their work. They began to walk in the way that God had laid out for them.

Now there is a 1st milestone in our walk, the way God has laid out for us. It begins with belief.

And I have heard people say to me, "It doesn't matter what you believe as long as you believe". Do you know that surveys have been taken and in America at one point there were about 6 million people who believed that Elvis was still alive? Did that save them?

I tried witnessing to a man once and I found out he belonged to a demon possession cult. He believed in a spirit he called "Red Dog" (and no it wasn't the beer). He believed this spirit was channeled by a woman who led their worship services. He believed. Did that save him?

No, we need to believe in the **"name of the only Son of God."** As John 3:18 says. We need to believe in Jesus and live out those beliefs by stepping into the good works that God has prepared for us to do. Ephesians is very clear these good works won't save us, but they are evidence that we are already saved. We are already ***"raised up with Jesus and seated with him in the heavenly places."***

Now I want to point out that the whole Ephesians passage is in the plural just like the Lord's Prayer. When we read it we think it is in the singular and addressed to singular people and in one sense that is correct because we are all individuals and that is where faith begins.



But the point that it makes by being in the plural is that we are saved together. We are given good works to do together. We are linked, bound, bonded together by our faith in Jesus Christ and through this become one Body.

We are given the free gifts of faith, grace and eternal life in this life and the evidence of that are the good works that we do! It is in service that the grace of God becomes real to us and to those we serve. It is in service, good works, that we live out “Loving our neighbor as ourselves.”

It is in living out our membership vow of “Service” that the Body of Christ on earth becomes real and tangible to us and others.



In the end there are no solitary Christians. To be a Christian means to join a team, a church, a body of believers.



At Vista Church there are many evidences of our common belief. There are many things we do together to make the love of God real, to serve. Our Mission Committee supports 16 different missions that over the next three weeks you will discover on the back page of our bulletin. Today we start with our mission work in Agua Prieta because today we are dedicating those going there for mission work this coming Saturday.

Here's what we're doing in Agua Preita:

Fuente de Vida Methodist Church (our sister church) in Agua Prieta,
Mexico Economic Advancement Program

Fuente de Vida building needs

Fuente de Vida Scholarships

Fuente de Vida School Supplies

Fuente de Vida Coffee

We participate in person and through our giving. We give an enormous amount of money away more than any single person could do. Remember the passage is in the plural. We then reap the rewards together on earth, and in heaven, and bring Glory to God.

John 3:21 reads, “But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may

be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.”

This is so closely related to the focus verse in Ephesians 2:10, “For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good

works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.”

Our good deeds are meant to be seen, not for our glory, but for the glory of God, and so we see once again how one vow of service is tied to another of “witness”. God has given us good works to do, to love on others, to find the joy of love, and to witness the love of God in this world.

In the transitions in life a lot of Christians who take their beliefs, faith, and service seriously, they have distress, and sense of being lost. They have defined their calling and purpose in life for so long in one particular way that they can't see living life a different way. Like Moms and Dads when all the children leave home.

For many its retirement, because for Christians our jobs are our vocations, our Christian callings, and so many ask who am I now? For others it's a move in location that ends one way of life and a new way is yet to be found. For many it is the onset of health problems, or simply getting older and having to let go of something that once was so important and defined to ourselves who we were.

In these times of transition its important rest before God, to pray and reflect before God so that our spirits and minds can be open to what God wants us to do next. And what is next might be as close as the most immediate need we come across.

Now one final word, to those who because of age or ill health might be thinking, “I can’t do anything anymore!!” That’s ok. You are part of a serving church by your prayers, presence and gifts. We’re in this together. And maybe your purpose in life is to now let others serve you and in that way they can walk in the way God has given them.

A writer named Saralee Perel told about an incident that taught her this basic truth. Saralee is severely disabled from a spinal cord injury. For 8 years she would not let grocery store baggers carry her groceries to the car always saying, “No thanks.” One day out of sheer exhaustion, when a young 19 year old bagger asked her if she could bring the bags to her car, she said, “yes” for the first time.

Saralee said her immediate emotion at that point was a sense of failure.

Saralee wrote, “The young bagger stood by the open door where I was sitting. She said, “I know you could have done this yourself. But it was so much easier to let me do it. And then she said a life-altering sentence, **“Getting help should never make you feel bad.**

It should always make you feel good.” Saralee never forgot those words and lived them out as she began to let others help her live.

So, if you can’t “do something anymore” do something even better and give another Christian the privilege of walking in the good works that Christ has prepared for them to do.

Ask for help for in your asking you will help them. Both of you will live out your calling and purpose in life.

What is God saying to you and what are you going to do?

Dedication of Agua Prieta Mission Team

Leader: God has called and gifted you to follow him in the way of life that leads to Agua Prieta Mexico to serve. Will you take up this mission to do the good works that God in Christ has created you to walk in?

People: We will!

Leader: Will you accept your calling as ambassadors of the Good News of God's love in Jesus Christ as you work with the people of Agua Prieta?

People: We will!

Let us close by praying this prayer together from the Moravian Daily Texts devotional:

“Heavenly father, help us to remember that we are your ambassadors. May we represent you in such a way that others may see our good works, but give You the glory! In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.