

Created for Good Works – Just Like the BMW Sports Wagon

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It's clearly created for good works.

The 2009 BMW 535i xDrive Sport Wagon, that is.

No, you don't buy this one for style. That's not the point. If style and good looks are what you're after, drift over to somewhere else in the showroom or visit another dealer.

The 535i was created only for good works.

Consider: This station wagon has a 300 horsepower, 3-liter, inline six cylinder, twin turbo engine. It comes with an array of standard features: power sunroof, high end sound equipment, rain-sensing wipers, Bluetooth phone provisions and much more. The buyer can add ski equipment storage features, a power tailgate, a cell-phone cradle and iPod/USB adapter, a universal garage door opener, night vision equipment, lane-departure warnings, heated steering wheel and seats, headlamp washers and multi-contour seats. The list goes on and on.

Oh, the gas mileage isn't all that great (16 mpg city, 24 mpg highway), but who cares with a price tag of \$72,345? After all, it makes sense that something created for good works will come with high costs.

The writer of the Letter to the Ephesians appreciated that truth.

Oftentimes the readers of this letter focus on only the cost involved, for understandable reasons. Unlike the purchaser of a loaded BMW 535i, in the Ephesians case the cost is borne by – get this! – somebody else: by an abundantly gracious and generous God, acting in and through God's chosen agent, Jesus Christ.

The narrative normally goes something like this: God takes worthless human beings — worthless because they are disobedient to God their creator and addicted to passions of the flesh (like buying \$72,345 cars for their own comfort and pleasure) — and saves them strictly out of God's mercy from their certain death and gives them abundant life with Jesus Christ who, by the power of God, conquers death and rises to vital, powerful and enduring life. There is absolutely nothing that the human beings do to gain this gift or free themselves from fleshly addictions.

No wonder, then, that people reading this amazing story get fixated on the incredible part about unworthy human beings getting saved from seemingly inevitable death and receiving new and abundant life not by what they do but only by God's grace and mercy.

Understandably, those who believe the story pay a lot of attention – almost exclusive attention – to that part of the plot.

But that part of the plot – as important as it is in terms of the drama – is not the whole story or even the main point of the story.

Here's the way the story ends in the Letter to the Ephesians:

For we (human beings) are what God has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life. (Ephesians 2:10)

That is, in the whole story human beings are saved from death and revived to life, totally by God's mercy, so that those human beings can do what God always creates them to do – to do good works – and to do these good works as their normal, regular and everyday way of life.

It's not that those good works save and revive human beings; it's that God-saved and God-revived human beings can and will do the good works that have been, are and always will be God's intention for the creation.

What are the good works?

The writer of Ephesians provides some general principles (be humble, gentle, patient, loving, peaceful – see 4:1-2) and a number of specifics (see the final three chapters). But I think it is fair to summarize these good works that now should become a way of life for members of the Christian community as something like: act toward others (with unmerited mercy and undeserved love) as God has acted toward you in and through Jesus Christ.

The good works certainly apply to personal ethics. And in a democratic republic, where the people are empowered to participate in the formation of public policies, disciples of Jesus unavoidably are mandated to develop a political ethic grounded in an understanding of good works that applies to a common, shared, comprehensive good – which today has to apply to issues of health care, public education, energy consumption and environmental protection, human rights, criminal justice and economic recovery and reform, to name only the most obvious.

To embrace the whole drama portrayed in the Letter to the Ephesians, not just part of it, and to embrace its main point, probably has some particular relevance to those followers of Jesus who are considering the purchase of the BMW 535i xDrive Sport Wagon priced at \$72,345.

But then again the letter and its whole and central message probably apply to most of us who live in a society based on passions of the flesh.

Even in tough economic times, each of us is challenged to ponder what it now means to be created, mercifully and lovingly, for good works – and actually to do those good works in our personal and political lives.