

Ephesians: *God's Masterpiece*
Ephesians 2:1-10

As we've seen over the past two weeks, Paul articulates the heart of the Gospel in Ephesians 2:1-10. He begins with the bad news regarding the universal dilemma of unredeemed souls in vss. 1-3: apart from Christ, we are dead in our sins and transgressions; we are captive to the spirit of this age, to the devil, and to the desires of the flesh; and we are destined for God's wrath. Then, beginning in vs. 4, Paul articulates what God chose to do because of His infinite mercy and His deep love for this broken world: God made us alive in Christ, raising us up with Him and seating us with Him in the heavenly places! We have been saved, and our salvation is by grace alone and through faith alone!

But there is still a bit of meat on the bone here that we have not yet considered, and it has to do with Paul's answer to the question, "But to what end?" In other words, God made us alive...He saved us when didn't deserve to be saved...but to what end...for what purpose? What are God's expectations of those He has made alive? That is the question we will address this morning, but first...let us once again stand and read together Ephesians 2:1-10:

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ²in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— ³among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. ⁴But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— ⁶and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹not a result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

My message falls under three subheadings: 1) Two Heresies of Good Works; 2) A New Creation; and 3) On Becoming Your True Self.

I. Two Heresies of Good Works

Over the past two weeks we looked deeply into verses 1-9 of our text; but I have not yet addressed vs. 10. Here is what Paul writes in vs. 10, "¹⁰For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."

Before we get to vs. 10, the final verse of this famous passage, we must remember the great pains that Paul has taken to communicate the unmerited grace of God that saved dead souls. I know we already covered this ground, but I cannot possibly speak about the subject of "good works" in vs. 10 unless we take time to revisit the redundant, incredibly clear context that precedes vs. 10, which is simply this: God made us alive in Christ when we were dead in our sins and trespasses, thus we have been saved by grace through faith...it was God's gift...not by works...so that no man may boast...PERIOD.

Church, no matter what I say about “good works” in verse 10...no matter how tempted you are to add a bit of law back to grace...don’t do it! Our salvation is God’s doing through Jesus on the cross, and there is not one ounce of that saving work that we can take credit for...not one ounce.

Now, why is it so important for us to redundantly cover that ground again? Well, there are two heresies regarding “good works” that many people knowingly or unknowingly have adapted.

First of all, we are very inclined to believe what I would call “the religion of good works.” Every other religion in the world will, in one way or another, insist that we have to do enough good works to be accepted by a good god and/or go to the place with the good people. That was a common misunderstanding amongst the Jews in the first century, but that was also a common assumption among the pagan Gentiles. Think about it: no matter how sophisticated or how rudimentary a religion or philosophy might be, we all generally live by the haunting notion that “what comes around goes around,” right? There’s a lot of ways that we can say that. Polite people say, “You get what you deserve.” Unpolite people say, “Karma’s a (bad thing).”

Now, to be sure, our choices always have consequences...that’s how we learn. And I think we would all agree that our bad behavior tends to catch up with us. However, if we extend that line of reasoning to eternal matters, we inevitably come to a religion of works which will boil down to this: I need to do more good than bad so that the good consequences outweigh the bad consequences...and should there be an afterlife, I want my good consequences to reward me rather than my bad consequences to damn me. That is a heresy...it is the religion of good works, and it is simply not true. The religion of good works is an “anti-Gospel” religion.

The second heresy of “good works” is similar to the first but slightly worse. It is what I would refer to as, “God owes me” religion. “God owes me” religion generally goes like this: If I strive to obey all the laws, help old ladies across the street, and do all the right religious things...if I’ve been good, then God owes me good things.”

Now...I suspect most of you are muttering under your breath, “I would never think that way.” Oh...but you do think that way...almost all of us do. Here’s how you’ll know that you are part of the “God owes me” religion: when something horrible happens in your life, you’ll keep asking, “What did I do to deserve this?” I don’t mean to be disrespectful of anyone’s pain or hardships or loss...not in the least. And it is the most natural question to ask when we experience hardships...completely natural and very understandable. But at the risk of offending you, may I simply point out that if you are asking that question, you have a “God owes me” theology. You have knowingly or unknowingly been operating on the premise that God brings about good things for those people who do good, and God brings about bad things to those people who do bad. Since you think of yourself as a good person, you are very hurt, confused, and rattled when bad things happen to you because you intuitively believe that God owes you better. Or, even worse, you think that you actually deserve all the suffering that you are now

experiencing because of all the bad things you have done in your life, so you have reasoned that God is justly punishing you.

Again, most of us knowingly or unknowingly think this way. We honestly believe that if we are good, God will protect us from all the bad stuff; and if the bad stuff is happening to us, we must have done something to make God angry. By the way, if you ever hear the religion of works of the religion of “God owes me” preached in a church, immediately stand up and walk out the door and don’t look back because that teaching is a false gospel.

Here in Ephesians 2:1-10 we are reading the ACTUAL Gospel of Jesus Christ, and it is so counterintuitive that you will never fully grasp it; you’ll constantly struggle to believe it; and you’ll be forever grateful for it! Contrary to popular belief, God doesn’t give us what we deserve. I deserve Hell on my best day, and so do you according to God’s standard...but God doesn’t give us what we deserve. Instead, when we were dead in our trespasses, because of His great mercy and love, God made us alive through His son Jesus who suffered what we deserve in our place. We deserve condemnation, but because of Jesus God gives us forgiveness. We deserve Hell, but because of Jesus God gives us Heaven. We deserve wrath, but because of Jesus God gives us grace. And oh, by the way, because God gives us unmerited grace by sending His precious Son to die in our place...God owes us absolutely NOTHING. He does not owe us good things; He does not owe us health or wealth or ease; He does not even owe us an explanation for why we are suffering hard times. If we are saved by His unmerited grace and infinite mercy...if we are saved because God absorbed the cost of our evil through His only Son, God owes us nothing.

Church, can you see that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is directly CONTRARY to the religion of works and the religion of “God owes me”? Maybe you are here today or watching online and you actually believe that God owes you a better life for all the good things you have done. You find yourself shaking your fist at God, demanding that you get what you deserve. Friend, may I give you a piece of advice? Never, ever, ever ask God to give you what you deserve...you would not like how that turns out. You think you deserve good things from a good god because you have done good works according to your standard of goodness...but that’s like telling a judge that you should get away with murder because you help out at the food pantry. We don’t get judged by the good we have done, nor do our good works somehow purchase us a pass when it comes to the law. You break the law; you pay the price...period. Apart from Christ, that will certainly be the case for us all. But this is why the good news is good news: Jesus paid our debt, suffered our punishment, and atoned for our sin against God. Because Jesus satisfies the infinite rift between us and God, we are forgiven, and we have been reconciled to God. Jesus did that...we didn’t. God made us alive when we were dead. Thus, Paul makes it very clear: we are saved by grace...not by good works. However, we have been saved FOR good works!

And that brings us to my second subheading...

II. A New Creation

In vs. 10 Paul writes, ¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

As a final stanza to the hymn of salvation by grace alone, Paul describes the new thing that has come about in the lives of the believers as a result of God's grace, and what we can expect from those who have been made new.

First, Paul writes, "For we are His workmanship..." Everything Paul writes here in vs. 10 naturally follows from God's saving work in Christ...that's why Paul begins with the word, "For..." The result of God's making us alive in Christ is that "...we are His workmanship..."

The Greek word for "workmanship" is the word *poeme*, from which we get our English word, "poem." The literal translation of *poeme* is "work" or "creation," but the sense here is that we...the redeemed...the Church...those who have been made alive in Christ...are God's showcase work...His ultimate masterpiece...we are His work of art! I want you to think about that for a moment...

When we consider the infinite expanse of the universe, the glory of the mountains, the vastness of the sea, the beauty of a sunset, the diversity of the animal kingdom, and the amazing creatures called human beings, we behold God's glory and majesty in them all. But here Paul describes the GREATEST testimony to God's immeasurable grace...God's ultimate glory...His showcase piece--it is dead, condemned souls who have been made alive in Christ! Nothing in all of creation will testify to the greatness of God like a redeemed soul!

NT scholar F. B. Meyer writes: That He could love us when we were dead like Lazarus, in trespasses and sins; that He has linked us in the bonds of indissoluble union with his Son; that He had made it possible for us to share his Resurrection, his Triumph, and his Throne; that we, the poor children of earth and sin, should be admitted into the inner circle of Deity--this will be, to all eternity, the mightiest proof of the exceeding riches of his grace.

Church, redeemed souls are what the Bible calls, "God's workmanship...God's masterpiece."

Paul goes on, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus..." When Paul writes the word "created," he uses a different word (*ktisthentes*), a term that speaks to God's work in creating the heavens and the earth.

So Church, if you have been saved by grace in Christ, you have been twice created! In John 1:3 we learned that "all things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made." We were first created through Christ as was all the creation, but sin separated us from the LIFE of God and left us spiritually dead in our sins and trespasses, so that we had no God-life in us. Yet when God made us alive with Christ, we were re-created IN CHRIST. We were "born again," as Jesus predicted in John 3. It is the fulfillment of Jesus' promise in John 10 when He said, "I have come that they may have LIFE and have it abundantly!" Paul writes in 2

Corinthians 5:17: Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

When God made our dead souls alive in Christ, He did not simply resuscitate the old man...I hope you will not imagine old Lazarus stumbling out of the grave with the lingering stench of death clinging to his every step. We were not resuscitated in Christ; we were RE-CREATED. The old man has been crucified with Christ (Galatians 2:20); and what we are now is a new creation...we are God's masterpiece. Paul writes in Gal. 2:20-21: I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

The new creation of dead souls made alive is the "I but not I" existence that Paul just articulated in Galatians 2. We are still ourselves...in fact, we are more ourselves than ever...but it is the life of Christ in us that now defines our new existence. It is the life of Christ in us that leads to good works. Paul writes, ¹⁰"For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works"

Church, can you feel the counter-intuitive tension of the Gospel? Satan wants you to believe that you are saved BY good works because he knows that you will either become arrogant about your own self-righteousness or despondent about your failures...either will keep you enslaved under his influence. But hear again the good news of the Gospel: We are not saved *by* good works; we are saved *for* good works!

NT scholar William Barclay writes: Good works can never earn salvation; but there is something radically wrong if salvation does not produce good works. We cannot earn God's love; but we can and must show how grateful we are for it by seeking with our whole hearts to live the kind of life which will bring joy to God's heart.

Dr. Kent Hughes writes: Works are a sign that we are His workmanship! No one more wholeheartedly than Paul repudiated good works as a ground of salvation; no one more strongly insisted on good works as a fruit of salvation. Authentic believers, those made by God's hand, work for Him.

Dr. John Stott writes: Good works are indispensable to salvation—not as its grounds or means, however, but as its consequences and evidence.

Good works are the inevitable OUTFLOW of our relationship with Jesus. His life in us will inevitably lead to good works because we are now a new creation IN CHRIST designed to produce good works that bring glory to God and hope to the world.

And that leads me to my last subheading...

III. On Becoming Your True Self

When I first moved to Kansas 14 years ago, I purchased a 21” Troy-Bilt push-mower. Sadly, my garage had no room thanks to an old fishing boat and 26000 bikes, so for the past 14 years that old mower has been sitting under my deck...subject to the elements, dirt, dust, and rust. Well, as you might expect, when we went to use the old mower this summer, it wouldn’t start. I replaced the spark plug and did what I could to make it run, but to no avail. Now, in theory, the mower was still a mower. It was exactly the same mower I bought 14 years ago...but it didn’t work. I could still push it around, fill it with gas, change the oil, and sharpen the blade...but to what end? If the mower doesn’t run...it if won’t work...it may be a mower, but if it’s not operating the way it is supposed to, it is destined for the landfill, right?

Well, instead of giving up on the old mower, I took it apart and replaced the carburetor...and behold, it now works. Note that the mower couldn’t fix itself, and apart from an intervention by its owner, it was destined for the junk yard. But when the mower received a new carburetor, it began to work in the way it was designed to work. The evidence of what it was designed to do is now obvious by what it does.

I want you to keep that illustration in mind as we consider these final words in vs. 10, “¹⁰For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes in *The Cost of Discipleship*: In eternity past, God not only chose a people to be in a relationship with himself, but he marked out a path for them to walk. This is a path of good works, which would characterize their lives throughout their Christian journey and bring glory to God.”

Every human soul was specifically designed by God for good works that God prepared for us before we ever born. That is to say, not one single human life is an accident...not one single human life is unimportant or insignificant. We were all designed to play a role in God’s world...and we were made to “walk” in that role.

However, due to the corruption of sin, when we were separated from the eternal life of God, our souls became lifeless, and we became like that lawn mower that doesn’t run. Now, a lawn mower that doesn’t run is still a lawnmower, and that lawnmower can serve as a table for you to stack things on, or an anchor for your boat, or decoration for your back yard...but the mower will not function as a mower if it doesn’t run.

In the same way, our lives will never work in the way we were designed to work apart from the life of God IN us. The “eternal life” that Jesus promised is the fuel of the soul; but without that fuel we simply cannot “walk” or work as we were intended to.

So here again is the good news of the Gospel: In Christ we have been redeemed! By God’s grace, that which was dead has been made alive! Where there was formerly no life, there is now eternal life! Where dead souls once walked in sins and trespasses, following the spirit of this age and the prince of this world, we now see souls fully alive following Jesus and walking in the

good works that God prepared beforehand for us to do. That which was once broken and corrupted and destined for destruction has been remade into a masterpiece...a unique and priceless work of art!

Dr. Kent Hughes captures this truth when he writes:

Each of us has an eternally-designed job description that includes the task, the ability, and the place to serve. You may prefer Jerusalem, but you will glorify Him more in Babylon if He has called you there. And whatever the task to which He has called you, you will be equipped for it as surely as a bird is capable of flight. And in doing the works He has called you to do, you will be both more and more His workmanship and more and more your true self.

I LOVE that quote, and particularly the last line: “in doing the works He has called you to do, you will be more and more your true self.”

Friends, let me tell you something: if Christ is not in you...you have never met YOU...nor has anyone else for that matter. In other words, the TRUE SELF is both unknowable and unattainable without the life of God indwelling the soul. It would be like owning a lawnmower that never started. It might look impressive; it might shine on the outside; but if it doesn't run, we'll never understand what it is or what it is capable of. That is true for our souls as well. If Christ is not in you, you have NO CONCEPT of who you are or what you are capable of. You are a lawnmower with a gummed-up carburetor, and you cannot fix yourself.

However, when the Owner replaces that corrupted part of you and redeems that which was destined for the junkyard, then and only then will you and the rest of world come to understand who you truly are and what you are truly capable of accomplishing. Then and only then will you walk in the works that God designed you to accomplish with the time that you've been given.

Friends, don't waste another day of your life walking away from your true self, walking as one enslaved by the world and the Evil One, following all the lies and deceit of this age. Call upon the name of Jesus, be filled with His eternal life, and discover who you truly are: you are an adopted child of God; you are God's masterpiece; and you have a destiny that was prepared just for you before the foundation of the world...it is that destiny to which you are now being summoned...to walk in it...to give the rest of your life to it...it is why you have life and breath...for such a time as this. Call upon the name of Jesus in faith, and be transformed into your true self, for the glory of God and the good of the world. Amen.