

We Are God's Workmanship

Ephesians 2:10

“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”

For some time there was a little magnet on our refrigerator that pictured a caterpillar (worm), and the caption underneath simply read, “Be patient God is not finished with me.”

In our last study of this epistle we looked at the fact that "God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it." **We saw that salvation is totally dependent on our faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ apart from our own merit or of our good works.**

As one studies the scriptures it becomes abundantly clear that God is continuously working on us, bringing us up in maturity, shaping our hearts, and developing our faith. 1 Samuel 2:26 points us to Samuel, who "continued to grow in stature and in favor with the Lord and with men." And we hear it in the exhortation of Peter, who made this conclusion in 2 Peter 3:18, "But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." The writer to the Hebrews says this in Hebrews 6:1, "Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity..."

But when we come to Ephesians 2:10 Paul has a totally different thought in mind. Look closely at what he says, "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." **The Greek word translated “workmanship” does not convey to us what Paul was actually saying.** The word actually means “masterpiece,” and reads like this, “For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.” **In other**

words, God's "workmanship" ("masterpiece") is not the ongoing process of what God is doing in you; it is the completed work of what God has done in you. Even though you are, in one sense, called to grow in the grace and knowledge of God, you are in another sense *complete*. To live on another level, you need to understand that you are God's finished work.

The word "workmanship" or "masterpiece" is a term for an end product. It is finished. Done. Imagine that you went down to a car lot to buy a car and all you saw was the raw metal frame. It had no seats, no dash, no mirrors, no paint, no tires, and no engine. That, my friends, is an unfinished product. That is not what God made of you when he made you new in Christ Jesus. He has blessed you in the heavenly realms. When Jesus rose from the dead, you were raised up to life with him. When Jesus was established on his throne, the promises of God to you were seated, or established with him. If you believe in him, you are completed in him. You are a "masterpiece" of life. You are, "God's workmanship." And that, my friend, is good news.

To really appreciate this, we have to go back a few verses and see just what God has made us from. Look at what Paul has said in Ephesians 2:1-9, "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath."

Not so very long ago I was "surfing" through the television channels when I came across a television show called "Junkyard Wars." This is how they describe their show on their web site: "If you locked Tim Allen, Mad Max and Monty Python in a garage, you'd end up with Junkyard Wars - the engineering contest of harebrained schemes, incredible tools, and lots and lots of duct tape. This program pits two teams of tool-toting gear-heads against one another to see who

can create the biggest, fastest or strongest whatever with parts they scrounge out of a junkyard."

In other words, the assignment is the teams are given an automotive project to build, but all of the parts and materials have to be salvaged from the Junk Yard – no new parts can be used. Obviously, they are on a time-line, and if you do not finish by the deadline you are disqualified.

Although the setting is totally different, and God does not make something new out of something from the Junk Yard, the principle is still pretty much the same. The person, who lives without Jesus Christ, more than likely, will end up in the Junk Yard of life. And that describes each of us in this building tonight. We once were dead in our transgressions and sins. And, as far as the kingdom of God is concerned, our own righteousness was nothing more than waste - Junk. As Paul puts it, we were objects of wrath, headed for the incinerator. And when we heard the Word of God, our faith kicked in, and we received Jesus Christ as our personal Savior, and 2 Corinthians 5:17 says that we became a “new creation.” In other words, God took hold of us through his son Jesus, and made of us something useful. And Paul says we were “created in Christ Jesus to do good works, that God prepared in advance for us to do.”

I have said many times before, the biggest problem that we have as Christians is that we have forgotten what we were before we were saved. Therefore, Paul gives us this insight.

First of all, if we understand this, we gain a greater appreciation and love for God. Second, we learn to conduct ourselves as people who live on another level when we have the humility that truth expresses. How can I be angry at the unreached people of this earth when I once lived among them, with the same desires, with the same selfish attitude, with the same evil desires and thoughts, and with the same spiritual rebellion? How can a former object of wrath have anything other than compassion for the present objects of wrath?

Yet, if we are honest with our selves, much of the time, we are angry. We're ticked off at our politicians for lying to us. We are angry with the liberals for trying to legalize same-sex partnerships and encouraging the homosexual lifestyle. We lose our temper and pitch a fit when someone cuts us off on the highway or breaks into the line to get in front of us.

You might be thinking, "Well, I never..." **And just before you finish that lie that you are about to tell, I've got news for you.** Yes you did. The Bible says in Ephesians 2:3, "All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath." I hope we will keep this in mind as we build bridges of grace and friendship to the unchurched and underchurched people in our world.

In fact, if you will pay close enough attention, you will find that your flesh still tries to rise up in you on a daily basis. And I promise you, if you will allow it to do so, your "flesh" will rise up and become the *denominate factor* in your life. And when your "flesh" gets out of control, it is like the passion of a bull that rams down a fence to get to the pretty little cows on the other side of the field. It's like the midnight awakenings of a pregnant woman who rouses her sleeping husband; "I want some ice cream...now!"

You see, when you give in to your flesh, you will begin to rationalize everything from premarital sex and extramarital sex to running red lights to eating just one more Hershey's kiss. And the truth of the matter is this – regardless of how long you have been saved, and regardless of how "spiritual" you might think you are, on any given day, when your spiritual guard is down, your "flesh" can rise up and cause you to act as if you do not even have a *nodding acquaintance* with the Lord of glory.

The amazing truth about this thing called “passion” or “emotion” is that it is a gift from God. That is how we are wired. God made us emotional people. And yet, our emotions are the very thing that Satan tries to use against us: anger, selfishness, jealousy, etc. But God wants us to use those same emotions, same passions, that Satan tries to pervert; God wants us to use them for His glory.

Look at verse 3 where Paul says, “Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.” That word “wrath” is a very interesting word that literally means, “an angry, violent passion.” In other words, Paul uses a word that implies that before we were saved, our anger caused us to want to “get even,” wanted us to punishment those who had wronged us. That was our nature and that was our desire. In fact, we were so filled with “wrath” that we constantly spoke words of “wrath.” We used word like, “I hope they get what they deserve.” “This just is not fair.” “What gives them the right?” These are all words of “wrath.” They are words of anger. And the sad truth is that many of these are the very words that far too many Christians are still using. Why? Because we are still allowing the pull of the flesh to dominate areas of our thought life.

In order to see how emotions under control are used for God’s glory, we have been given this biblical example. Mark 3:1-5 tells us what happened, “And He entered the synagogue again, and a man was there who had a withered hand. So they watched Him closely, whether He would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse Him. And He said to the man who had the withered hand, Step forward. Then He said to them, Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill? But they kept silent. And when He had looked around at them with anger, being grieved by the hardness of their hearts, He said to the man, Stretch out your hand. And he stretched it out, and his hand was restored as whole as the other.”

Now I don’t have to tell you that Jesus’ greatest critics was the legalistic religious crowd. And on this day, as He entered into the synagogue, He stopped to minister healing to a man with a

paralyzed hand. Knowing their thoughts, Jesus called the man to, "Step forward." With the man standing beside him, Jesus asked the religious leaders, "Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" **Obviously, they didn't answer him.** Why? To answer would have only proven foolish, and they were much too proud for that. **The truth is that any way they answered would have been an acknowledgement that they had gone too far in applying the Scripture.** I picture them just sitting there, staring, like someone in a debate whose point has just been blown out of the water. Mark 3:4-5 gives us some insight into what its like to have our emotions under control, "He (Jesus) looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, said to the man, Stretch out your hand. He stretched it out and his hand was completely restored."

What we have here is a confrontation of the two natures. The lost nature of the religious crowd, who were determined to get back at Jesus for breaking their religious traditions. Those people of the synagogue, represent those people whose mind is darkened to spiritual truth, therefore, they could only stare off in bewilderment in response to the light of truth Jesus had cast over their religiosity. And he did it with a simple question. **The divine nature, in contrast, is righteous and holy and good.** So Jesus, out of his divine nature, looks upon the sin-strong crowd with an anger that is filled with both disgust and compassion.

It seems odd, doesn't it, that Jesus can look upon men with anger and we, meanwhile, are told to put away all bitterness, rage, and anger (the same word as wrath)? But those instructions were not directed at emotions that were under the control of the Holy Spirit, but emotions that were under the control of the flesh.

You see, the emotions that are under the control of the Holy Spirit are emotions that portray the attitude of Christ. That is the idea that the have in Psalm 145:8-9 where we are told, "the Lord is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love. The Lord is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made."

And because “the Lord is gracious and compassionate,” and because He is “rich in love... even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ, and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.”

Here we were...dead; objects of wrath headed for the incinerator. And we are *not* simply a *work in progress*. When we received Jesus Christ as our personal Savior, we were made complete, as seen in Colossians 2:10, “...and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.” He has made us alive -with an emphasis on the past tense - he has made us alive, having raised us up and seated us with Christ in the heavenly realms.

So what does that really mean to us here tonight? I will tell you what it means. It means I am free to do the work God prepared in advance for me to do. **It means that my work in the kingdom is good work.** It means that I don’t have to work to earn anything because I can’t - it would only make me boast. It means that Philippians 1:6 is true in my life when it says, “being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.” **It means I can bear his stripes and share in his sufferings because I am a finished product.** I am not simply a work in progress. It means I am seated with the King of Kings. **It means I am enthroned with the Prince of Peace.** It means I am forever adopted into the family of God. It means that People can “dis” me all they want. **They can disrespect me, discredit me, disown me, disregard me, discount me, disenfranchise me, disturb me, disrupt me, disavow me, disagree with me, disgust me, disdain me, and displease me, but as long as I don’t let them discourage me or distract me from understanding who I am in Christ - that I am God’s workmanship—I’m living on another level.** It means I am God’s workmanship, his finished product, and he has created me anew through the cross of Jesus, his Son to do good things that he has prepared for me to do.

And, that, child of God, is who you are tonight.