

Made for a Purpose

Lesson for November 20, 2022

Unit III: God's Artwork

Scriptural Background: Revelation 2:1-7; Acts 19; Ephesians 2

Printed Text: Ephesians 2:1-10

Key verse: *For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.* (Ephesians 2:10, NIV)

Word Study

Hook

Ralph Barton, one of the top cartoonists of the nations, left this note pinned to his pillow before taking his own life: "I have had few difficulties, many friends, great successes; I have gone from wife to wife, from house to house, visited great countries of the world, but I am fed up with inventing devices to fill up twenty-four hours of the day."

Morning Glory, May 29, 1993.

In today's lesson we see our purpose is not to "invent devices to fill up twenty-four hours of the day" but to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Key terms

1. **Authority** (verse 2) – power to act; weight; "power" (KJV); "ruler" (NIV)
2. **Flesh** (verse 3) – body; human nature; materiality; kindred
3. **Kindness** (verse 7) – goodness; excellence; uprightness; gentleness
4. **Mercy** (verse 4) – pity; compassion
5. **Saved** (verse 5) – healed; preserved; rescued
6. **Trespases** (verse 1) – false steps; falling away; lapses; sins; slips; "transgressions" NIV)

Lesson Background

Ephesians follows a theme common in Paul's writings: connecting theory with practice. In this book, however, he goes into greater depth before making the transition. As a letter meant to be read by more than just the believers at Ephesus, this is an important look at how Christian belief should translate into Christian action.

Chapter 2 emphasizes the theme of salvation by grace through faith in Christ Jesus. First, Paul describes the process of salvation as the result of God's grace through faith (Ephesians 2:1–10). Human effort, and human goodness, are completely ineffective in our salvation. It makes a pair of related points about our status as saved believers. First, salvation is entirely dependent on the grace of God, not human efforts. Second, this means all Christians are part of the same family,

Jew, and Gentile alike. The believer is God's workmanship, created for good works and designed to abound in them. God has quickened the believer, saved them, and made them new creations.

In the first ten verses Paul presents the past, present and future of the Christian: what he was (verses 1-3); what he is (verses 4-6, 8-9); and what he will be (verses 7, 10). Within this framework he gives six aspects of salvation: it is from sin (verses 1-3); by love (verse 4); into life (verse 5); with a purpose (verses 6-7); through faith (verses 8-9); and unto good works (verse 10).

Lesson in Depth

I. What We Were (Ephesians 2:1-3)

And you [hath he quickened], who were dead in trespasses and sins: Salvation is from sin, which characterizes life before Christ. In the first three verses, there is perhaps no clearer statement in Scripture on the sinfulness of man apart from Christ.

Quickened means "made alive." (In 1:19), Paul prays for his readers to recognize what God's power has done in them. As part of the answer to this prayer (verses 1-10), inform them of some of the effects divine might has accomplished in them.

"The wages of sin is death" (Romans 3:23). Because man is born into sin he is born to death. Man does not become spiritually dead because he sins, he is spiritually dead because by nature he is sinful. When we are walking in our sin unforgiven, we are marking time to death. Each day becomes a little more hopeless because it is one day closer to death. Trespasses and sin bring physical and spiritual death.

Man's principal problem is that he has no right relationship to God, from whom he is alienated by sin. It has nothing to do with the way he lives; it has to do with the fact that he is dead even while he is alive. He is spiritually dead while being physically alive. Because he is dead to God, he is dead to spiritual life, truth, righteousness, inner peace, and happiness, and ultimately to every other good thing. Jesus took the punishment of death on His body on the cross and marked their bill paid in full, for all who would turn from their sin and accept Him as their Savior.

Romans 8:2 "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death."

John 5:21 "For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth [them]; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will."

Men apart from God are spiritual zombies, the walking dead who do not know they are dead. They go through the motions of life, but they do not possess it.

Dead in trespasses and sins: A sobering reminder of the total sinfulness and lostness from which believers have been redeemed. “In” indicates the realm or sphere in which unregenerate sinners exist. They are not dead because of sinful acts that have been committed but because of their sinful nature.

Committing sinful acts does not make us sinners; we commit sinful acts because we are sinners. Jesus confirmed this when He said, “The evil man out of his evil treasure brings forth what is evil” (Matt. 12:35).

A sinner’s doing good is good, but it cannot change his nature or his basic sphere of existence, and it cannot reconcile him to God. Jesus is the Spirit of Life. Though I was dead, yet shall I live in Him. Before we were saved we were like every other person who is apart from God, dead in . . . trespasses and sins. We were not dead because we had committed sin but because we were in sin. In this context, trespasses and sins do not refer simply to acts but first of all, to the sphere of existence of the person apart from God.

Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world: “Ye walked” means you lived.

You once walked (NIV): The self that **once walked** was the old man, now crucified with Jesus at the time of conversion. The sin nature inherited from Adam influenced the old man, but the world system and Satan do also. One might say that the influence of the old man lives on in what the New Testament calls the flesh.

Once walked means it should be different for those who are made alive by Jesus Christ. A dead man feels comfortable in his coffin; but if he were to be made alive again, he would instantly feel suffocated and uncomfortable. There would be a strong urge to escape the coffin and leave it behind. In the same way, when we were spiritually dead we felt comfortable in trespasses and sins; but having come to new life we feel we must escape that coffin and leave it behind.

The course of this world: The word course signifies all the tendencies, thoughts, pursuits, deeds and so on, that characterize the present period of history. “This world” (kosmos) means “world system.” That is, those philosophies, values, and lifestyles that are opposed to God and hostile to Him.

As Paul makes clear, the course of this world follows the leadership and design of Satan, the prince of the power of the air. Sinful men have many different ideas and standards, but they are in total agreement that the network of things in this world is more important than the divine perspective of God.

The spirit that now works in the sons of disobedience: In sin we respond to Satan’s “guidance.” The same ancient Greek verb is used in Ephesians 2:2 for the work of Satan in unbelievers as is used in Ephesians 3:20 for the power of God that works in believers.

The prince of the power of the air: This unique title for Satan speaks of his authority (**prince**) and his realm (**the air**, a way of referring to Satan’s “environment”).

We all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh: We once were among the *sons of disobedience*, proven by our conduct. We embraced **the lusts of the flesh**, which are primarily perversions of the legitimate desires of human nature.

Paul’s primary purpose here is not to show how unsaved people now live, though the teaching is valuable for that purpose, but to remind believers how they themselves formerly walked and formerly lived. All of us once lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.

We all had our conversation means “we all conducted ourselves.” In contrast to “ye,” (in 2:2), which refers to Gentiles. Note the “we” of this verse, which refers to Jews. In essence, Paul admits, “We Jews were no better than you Gentiles, both ethnic groups were sinful.” Children of wrath refers to people subject to divine punishment.

Our body of flesh came from the earth and causes us to want to be of the earth. We must crucify our flesh and put the Spirit of God in control of our life. The carnal mind is an enemy of God. The battle that has been raging since Adam and Eve, is the battle for the soul of man. The flesh wants to control the soul of man. If the flesh wins, then you are not a Christian. The Spirit of God will come and dwell in you if you become a spirit person. The breath of life is the spirit of mankind. The breath of life within us is of God. He breathed the breath of life into us, and we became a living soul. The soul is like the will of man.

And were by nature children of wrath: Because of our surrender to the old man, the world, and the devil, we **were by nature children of wrath**. We rightfully deserved God’s wrath and deserved it because of who we were by our heritage.

II. What We Are (Ephesians 2:4-7)

In verses 4-6, “But” begins to disclose God’s response to man’s sin of (verses 1-3). This divine response is expressed in three main verbs:

1. God ... **hath quickened us**. Because they were morally dead in sins, the Lord gave them spiritual life;
2. And **hath raised us up** together, that is, God has not allowed these Christians to remain in the grave of their old life with its sinful ways and habits, but He brought them into a new life and demonstration of it; and
3. God **made us sit together** in heavenly places, that is, He has brought us into His presence and into an intimate relationship with Himself.

But God... because of His great love: With **but** and **because**, Paul explained God’s reason behind reconciling man to Himself, and these reasons are found totally in God. The reasons are His rich **mercy** and **His great love**, which He focuses on **us**.

With which He loved us: We might imagine a God of rich **mercy** and **great love** who did not focus that mercy and love upon *us*. But behind the good news of God's salvation offered in Jesus is the fact that this mercy and love *is* extended to **us**.

His great love with which He loved us: Some warp the idea of God's great mercy and love into something that justifies our pride. Some imagine that God loves us *because we are so lovable*. Instead, God's love is so great that it extends even to the unlovely – to the *children of wrath* mentioned in the previous verse.

Every reason for God's mercy and love is found in Him. We give Him no *reason* to love us, yet in the greatness of His love, He loves us with that great love anyway. Therefore, we must stop trying to make ourselves lovable to God, and simply receive His great love while recognizing that we are unworthy of it. This is the *grace* of the Christian life.

Even when we were dead in sins: This is when God started loving us. He did not wait until we were lovable. He loved us even when we were dead in trespasses, providing nothing lovable to Him.

Quickened us together with Christ: Quickened means to make alive. This is what God did to those who were dead in sin. He shared in our death so that we could share in His resurrection life. The old man is crucified and we are new creations in Jesus with the old things passing away and all things becoming new.

In Adam all die, In Jesus Christ all live. Jesus is the Quickening Spirit which brings life everlasting. He is the Resurrection and the Life. Because He lives, we live also. Jesus took our sin upon His body on the cross. Our sin died on the cross.

In the place of our sin, Jesus clothed us in His righteousness washed in His precious blood. We are saved in Jesus, not because we deserve to be saved, but because He loved us. Grace is unmerited favor. Jesus offers this to everyone. It is up to us to accept this free gift from Jesus.

1 Corinthians 15:45 “And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit.”

When we became Christians, we were no longer alienated from the life of God. We became spiritually alive through union with the death and resurrection of Christ and thereby for the first time became sensitive to God. Paul calls it walking in “newness of life” (Romans 6:8).

By grace you have been saved: Paul is compelled to add here that this is the work of God's **grace**, in no way involving man's merit. Our salvation – our rescue – from spiritual death is God's work done for the undeserving.

And hath raised us up: The tense of “raised” and “seated” indicates that these are immediate and direct results of salvation. Not only is the believer dead to sin and alive to righteousness through Christ's resurrection, but he also enjoys his Lord's exaltation and shares in His preeminent glory.

Sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus: This is the present position of the Christian. We have a new place for living, a new arena of existence – we are not *those who dwell on the earth* (as Revelation often calls them), but our *citizenship is in heaven* (Philippians 3:20).

We don't sit in the heavenly places *with* Christ Jesus, or at least not yet. Instead, we sit in the heavenly places **in Christ** Jesus. Since our life and identity is **in Christ**, as He sits in heavenly places, so do we. This spiritual realm is where believers' blessings are (verse 1:3), their inheritance is (1 Peter 1:4), their affections should be (Colossians 3:3), and where they enjoy fellowship with the Lord. It is the realm from which all divine revelation has come and where all praise and petitions go.

In the ages to come: In the future, God will continue to show the exceeding riches of His grace to us. God will never stop dealing with us on the basis of grace, and will forever continue to unfold its riches to us through eternity.

That He might show (or demonstrate): This denotes the ultimate purpose for all that God did for the Ephesians (in verses 4-6). It is that throughout eternity He might make us understand more and more His goodness to us.

“From this verse it is clear that Paul fully expected the gospel of the grace of God to be preached in the ages to come. He had no notion of a temporary gospel to develop into a better, but he was assured that the same gospel would be preached to the end of the dispensation. Nor this alone; for as I take it, he looked to the perpetuity of the gospel, not only through the ages which have already elapsed since the first advent of our blessed Lord, but throughout the ages after he shall have come a second time. Eternity itself will not improve upon the gospel.” (Spurgeon)

The exceeding riches of His grace: “So is it with the grace of God: he has as much grace as you want, and he has a great deal more than that. The Lord has as much grace as a whole universe will require, but he has vastly more. He overflows: all the demands that can ever be made on the grace of God will never impoverish him, or even diminish his store of mercy; there will remain an incalculably precious mine of mercy as full as when he first began to bless the sons of men.” (Spurgeon)

v. One way to see the greatness of the grace of God is to see how He *begs* man to receive it. When we offer a gift to someone and they refuse it, we are likely to allow them to refuse and leave them alone. God does not do this with us; even when we refuse His mercy He reaches into His storehouse of grace and persists with us, *begging* us to receive the free gift.

III. What Are We to Do (Ephesians 2:8-10)

For by grace you have been saved: Paul cannot speak of this glorious work God does without reminding us that it is a gift of **grace**, given to the undeserving.

“**For**” gives the reason for this future demonstration of divine grace. It is because man owes his salvation to this grace or undeserved divine favor. The force of the Greek perfect tense “**are ye saved**”, indicates that the Ephesians were spiritually saved at some point in the past. And at the present time of writing they remain in this state of salvation.

And that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God: The work of salvation is God's gift. Paul's grammar here indicates that the words apply to the gift of *salvation* mentioned in Ephesians 2:4-8, and not directly to the **faith** mentioned in this verse.

This means that no part of salvation is "**of yourselves**" or due to what we do, the whole of salvation is the gift of God. Man, is saved "by grace", that is by the kindness of God in having Jesus die for our sins. But this grace is appropriated through faith. That is, man believes what God has done for him and relies upon Christ's atonement to blot out his sins and bring him into a proper relationship with God.

You cannot earn your way to heaven. Just as any gift, to have it, you must reach out and receive it unto yourself. Faith was counted unto Abraham as righteousness. Our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is what gives us our righteousness in God's sight.

Jesus put us in right standing with God, when He paid our debt in full with His blood at Calvary. We must say, thank you Jesus for dying for me. That is why we are saved. Jesus is our Savior. The gift of God, to all mankind who will accept it, is eternal life in Jesus Christ, our Lord.

The grace of God is the expression of His goodness toward the undeserving. Grace means "unmerited favor".

Not of works, lest anyone should boast: God did it **not of works** simply so that no one could **boast**. If salvation was the accomplishment of man in any way, we could boast about it. But under God's plan of salvation, God alone receives the glory. Obviously, if it is true that salvation is all by God's grace, it is therefore not as a result of works. Human effort has nothing to do with it (Romans 3:20; Galatians 2:16). And thus, no one should boast, as if he had any part. All boasting is eliminated in salvation. Nevertheless, good works have an important place, as Paul is quick to affirm.

The reason, in part that salvation is not achieved by works is to prevent men from bragging of having earned a place in heaven by themselves.

There is no room for boasting. The only thing we might consider boasting of is the greatness of God and His plan of salvation. Works will not get you to heaven. If we love God, and appreciate what He has done for us, we probably will work for Him, but our work does not save us. It just tells Him we love Him.

For we are His workmanship: God saves us not merely to save us from the wrath we rightly deserve, but also to make something beautiful of us. "**For**" verifies the assertion of man's good works having no part in obtaining salvation. Workmanship refers not to our original or physical birth, but to our spiritual birth: what we are spiritually in the good sense is due to God, not ourselves.

Before we can do any good work for the Lord, He has to do His good work in us. By God's grace, made effective through our faith, we become His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works. God has ordained that we then live lives of good works, works done in His power and for His glory.

We are **His workmanship**, His creation – something new He has made of us in Jesus Christ. “The spiritual life cannot come to us by development from our old nature. I have heard a great deal about evolution and development, but I am afraid that if any one of us were to be developed to our utmost, apart from the grace of God, we should come out worse than before the development began.” (Spurgeon) We are **His workmanship**, which translates the ancient Greek word *poiema*. The idea is that we are His beautiful poem. The Jerusalem Bible translates **workmanship** as “work of art.”

Created in Christ Jesus for good works: Created in Christ Jesus unto good works means “having been (morally), recreated by Christ Jesus for good works”. That is, Jesus remade our spiritual lives so that we could then do good works. The same power that created us in Christ Jesus empowers us to do the good works for which He has redeemed us. These are the verifiers of true salvation.

The apostle’s thinking is this: since the Christian has been given spiritual life for the purpose of doing good works, there could have been no good works by him prior to conversion that would merit salvation. Good works follow, do not precede, salvation.

Good works do not bring discipleship, but they prove it is genuine. When God’s people do good deeds they bear fruit for His kingdom and bring glory to His name. Good works cannot produce salvation but are subsequent and resultant God-empowered fruit and evidences of it.

This is the picture then. We are saved by grace and grace alone. The fruit of our salvation shows in our actions after we are saved. As I have said so many times, we must walk in the salvation Jesus provided for us. These works are in Christ Jesus. In the works that you do, the world should be able to see Jesus.

Although they have no part in gaining salvation, good works have a great deal to do with living out salvation. No good works can produce salvation, but many good works are produced by salvation. “By this is My father glorified,” Jesus said, “that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples” (John 15:8).

These good works are expected because God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them, and that is why James says faith is illegitimate if works are not present (James 2:17-26).

God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them:

1. God has a path for us
2. He has prepared good things for you and me
3. And he has done it with his grace and mercy

Lesson Summary

This lesson presents the immeasurable nature of God's grace which has totally changed both our reality and conduct forever. Christian life is examined in terms of a "before and after" contrast resulting from divine intervention. The Bible teaches that every person is created in the image of God, and every person has "followed the ways of this world" and "the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient" (Ephesians 2:2).

Verses 4-7 presents God's intervening actions and the transformation they wrought. Though we were children of wrath, God acted out of the wealth of divine mercy and abundance of love (verse 4). This divine conversion had nothing to do with how loveable we were, but with how incredibly loving God is. Thus, God made us alive with Christ, raised us with Christ, and sat us in the heavenly places where Christ now rules over all powers and dominions (2:5-6 echoing 1:20-21). In the Greek, the three verbs "made alive, raised, and seated" all have a prefix meaning "with," highlighting how God did to us what God had previously done to Christ. This emphasizes the divinely wrought solidarity shared between Christ and Christians.

Because of our behavior, all of us deserve God's just condemnation, but God saves people by grace through faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior; therefore, no one can brag that they are better than others or were saved by their good behavior. The enactment of divine love and grace has radically altered everything about who we are and whose we are, about how we live, why we live, and even where we live.

More than being saved from just condemnation, Paul wrote that Christians are God's handiwork: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!" (2 Corinthians 5:17). God saves people so they can do good works in the world. Jesus Christ "gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good (or good works)" (Titus 2:14).

Many people have done mighty works that were not good works. God does not require mighty works from His people, but God does require good works that anyone can do by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Whether our good works seem great or small to others does not matter to God. God prepared in advance the good works Christians do; therefore, God receives the praise for every good work of every Christian.