

We Are His Workmanship

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Preacher: Rev Iver Martin

[0 : 00] Let's turn now for a while to the New Testament this time, to the letter to the Ephesians and chapter 2. I'm going to read the whole of the section from the beginning of the chapter to verse 10, but I want us to focus particularly on the 10th verse.

Ephesians chapter 2, page 1175 of the Church Bible. Ephesians chapter 2 and from the beginning to verse 10, but focusing on verse 10.

And you were dead in trespasses and sins in 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, among 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.

But God, being rich in mercy because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in 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, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

[1 : 22] For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not of your own doing. It is the gift of God, not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.

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

That verse 10 is the verse I want us to think about today. We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

One of humankind's unique features is his creativity. The way in which a human being, as opposed to any other life form, can take something from nothing and create something absolutely phenomenal.

You can see it in many different walks of life. It's incredible to watch, for example, I suppose the best example would be a painting. Way back in the history of mankind, you have the very first glimpses of that very detail of where he takes something and he discovers he can use it to draw.

[2 : 58] And he begins to draw some primitive figures, usually human beings and animals. And from there, as that technology developed through the ages, he learns how to paint, and his ability to paint evolves through the centuries.

And so that you can go to museums today and find the most incredibly exquisite examples of humankind's creativity. You go to some of the great museums in the world, for example, the Louvre in Paris, and you see some of the great painters, and it takes your breath away to think of how does a person like Leonardo da Vinci, how is he able, how was he able, what kind of gift is it in a person to be able to take a canvas, to start from nothing and to take paints and to be able to create something like the Mona Lisa and the many, many other hundreds of paintings which are there, and in any museum that you'll come across in all different parts of the world.

Another example, of course, is man's ability to build. How is he able to plan, to take a piece of paper and to draw the kind of house that he wants to draw, and as long as it's safe and as long as it's reasonable, he gathers the materials together.

And what kind of skill is it for him to put each piece of material together? Some of these materials have been cut out of quarries. Some of these materials have been cut down.

They were trees, and he's cut them, and he's shaped them, and he's formed them, and he puts them together, and within a number of weeks, it's a beautiful house. It's the same with a sculpture.

[4 : 40] A person takes, a person will begin with a lump of granite. He will take the special tools like a chisel and a hammer, and you go into that person, you say, what in the world are you doing?

I think you're off your head, chiseling away at that lump of granite. There are plenty of things to do, and he's beaver away day after day. As soon as he's had his breakfast, he goes into the workshop, and he starts beaver away again.

And then eventually, after a few days, you begin to see that it's no longer a lump of granite. It's taking shape, and there's a nose, and there's a head forming, and eyes, and ears, and a body forming.

And when he's finished, he doesn't finish until he perfects this masterpiece, this work of art. Why is it that humankind has this obsession?

They have this ability, and it seems to be natural, more natural to some than others, but it seems to be a natural feature of the human race that he's, it's not only that he can do it, but he absolutely has to do it.

[5 : 43] Life just wouldn't be the same. The world just wouldn't be the same if it wasn't for humankind's creativity. And the more he creates, the more he wants to create more.

He wants to, the more he perfects what he has done, the more he wants to learn how to make it better, and how to create more. There's something natural within men and women that makes them create.

Whatever you say about the ability of some animals to use a tool, for example, I saw, you see these programs that try and suggest that there's a link somehow between man and animals because a bird drops a stone on an egg and tries to make, break the egg.

That's a kind of world of difference, I think, between an animal's doing that and the kind of creativity that humankind has to be able to start with nothing and to end up with the most incredible masterpiece, reflection and an expression of what is inside his heart and inside his mind so that not only he's able to make this painting, but the painting actually has a message within it.

It actually tells you something and you can interpret it the way that it's meant to, the message that it's meant to convey. That's the whole point.

[6 : 59] It's not just a skill. There's a whole emotion in it. It's a way of life. What is it about him? Well, it is simply this. Because humankind was created differently as a completely different life form as the image.

The Bible calls it the image and the likeness of God. And what that means is that we're able to say today that humankind is creative because God is creative.

And God has somehow transmitted that ability, of course, in lesser form, to humankind in order for him to show and to prove to us that we are made in the image of God.

You know this? Every time I see what humankind has done, I'm reminded of his genius and I'm reminded of his image, that he's been made in the image.

And it all reflects back, for me, it reflects back to God. I can't help thinking that we are fearfully and wonderfully made. You know, the Bible tells us that we can discern the being of God by looking up into the stars on a dark night and the heavens declare the glory of God.

[8 : 15] That's what the Bible tells us. But I believe that the work of humankind declares the glory of God also. And that through that work and that beauty and that creativity, you can see and discern and detect the brilliance and the perfection of God.

Now, of course, that work is marred and it's spoiled and stained by humankind's sinfulness. We've gone astray. So much of that creativity is focused in the wrong places.

And yet, you can't help but being drawn to the marvel of man's creativity because he himself has been created.

He is God's masterpiece. And as we read, God saw everything that he had done in Genesis chapter 1 after he had created and formed the world and the universe by the word of his power.

He saw everything that he had done and he was pleased with what he had made. What this verse tells us is something quite remarkable.

[9 : 23] And I want to stop at this verse today because it describes something about the Christian, the person who has been drawn into a relationship with Jesus Christ that I think is sometimes overlooked.

And that is this, that as well as being forgiven, as well as being changed, when if I asked you to describe today what a Christian was, you might use these words.

A person who is forgiven, a person who's born again, a person who's changed, a person who lives by faith in Jesus Christ. All of these are true. But what this verse tells us is something quite remarkable.

And I'll tell you what it is. That as far as God is concerned, when he looks at someone who follows Jesus, he describes us as his masterpiece.

It's difficult to believe, isn't it? Especially when we become very conscious of our own faults and failures and sinfulness, as we rightly are.

[10 : 33] Yet, that's what the Bible tells us. Let's read it again. For we are his workmanship. Who's the his?

God's. We, who's the we? Paul is writing to Christians, to people who have come to Jesus, come to faith in Jesus in Ephesus. That's who he's writing to. And he describes them as having been once dead in trespasses and sins and having been raised to newness of life.

But God, because he was rich in mercy, because of his great love with which he loved us, when we were dead in trespasses and sins, made us alive together in Jesus Christ. But now he says that we are God's workmanship.

And another word for that is his masterpiece. Well, you say that's going too far. Well, why is it going too far? Can you imagine God's workmanship without it being a masterpiece? Can you imagine God setting about any kind of work without it being, without it one day being made perfect?

I'm not saying we've reached that point yet. We haven't. And yet, God, as he looks at his, as his people, those who have come to Jesus Christ, his church, he sees us as his workmanship, albeit it's a work in progress.

[11 : 51] And yet God is able to see the end from the beginning and he's able to know that the end will definitely be fulfilled. The day will come when every single one of us will be made perfect and we will be brought and presented to Jesus Christ in a finished form.

And that day God will be pleased and is pleased even today of the work that he has done. I want us to look a little bit more deeply into this verse because it's an absolutely phenomenal verse.

I'm not saying the rest of the Bible is not phenomenal, but for the moment I want us to just focus upon this and the thoughts that draw out of this verse for our encouragement today.

First of all, I want us to see the source of this masterpiece. And then I want us to see the nature of the kind of work that it is.

Then I want us to see the way in which this masterpiece comes about. The methodology of this masterpiece.

[12 : 53] And then lastly, I want us to see the purpose for which this work is done by God. First of all then, I want us to see who is doing the work. Well, it's quite clear to us in verse 10.

We are his workmanship. I don't want to go any further than that for the moment. I just want to stop there and I want to reflect on this fact and this fact alone. Sometimes we tend to forget it, that if I am in Jesus today, if I am a follower of Jesus today, if I live by faith, then what has happened in my life is all of God's doing.

I haven't contributed to a single thing in my own salvation. And I think there are times where it's important to stop and for us to remember that fact.

That's one of the things that Paul wants to impress upon the people of Ephesus. One of the very first things that he wants to impress upon the people of Ephesus is that they did nothing towards their own salvation.

And he does this in chapter 1. Then he goes back in time before the world was created.

[14 : 11] And he says this, In other words, he's coming to these Christians in Ephesus, these new Christians, he says, I want you to know this before you make the classic mistake of ever thinking that in any even small way that you contributed to your own salvation, forget it.

Because everything you are, every single thing you are, is due to the fact that God, before the foundation of the world, He planned for you, He planned for your conversion, He planned for your faith in Jesus, He planned for you to hear the gospel, and you have heard the gospel.

And what you are, the change that has taken place in your life, what you are is God's doing. And here's him saying exactly the same thing in verse 10. He goes on, of course, in chapter 2 to tell us that that great verse makes this great statement.

By grace you have been saved. What does grace mean? Grace, grace would not be grace if we deserved even a small amount of it.

God's grace is His saving kindness, His saving love toward us in focusing on us and changing us and taking us out of, as we sing very often, of the fearful pit and the mighty clay of sin and setting our feet upon the rock.

[15 : 38] He alone has the power to do that. He alone has the will to do that, and He has done it, and He will continue to do it. And we believe that He will continue to do it, even in this place today.

So if I'm a Christian today, and if you're a believer today, then this verse tells us, if it tells us one thing, it tells us this, that our salvation is due to nothing other than God's grace in our lives.

And surely that should humble us. Surely every day, if we lived in that consciousness, then that would affect the way that we live. It would affect the way that we talk to other people, the way that we think about other people, the way that we act toward.

Surely it would quash any semblance of pride that might arise in us. If we remember, if we would only remember, I am what I am, by God's grace and by God's grace alone.

But it tells us something else. That if you're not a Christian today, if you're not a follower of Jesus Christ, then you can't do a single thing to save yourself.

[16 : 43] You can do something to improve yourself. Of course you can. If you think that you drink too much, I'm sure that there are ways of reducing that.

If you think that you have bad habits, like smoking or swearing, then you probably can decide one morning, I'm going to turn over a new leaf. Of course you can improve your behavior or your lifestyle.

They tell us to do that all the time, like not taking salt on your food as much. You can improve that. That's no problem. But that's not what the Bible talks about. That's not what the Bible is about at all. The Bible is about a complete transformation that God alone can bring to pass, can bring about in your life.

And sometimes I think that people who aren't following Jesus, they've got this notion that somehow that it's up to them to live a better life or that somehow or other that becoming a Christian is something that they can do.

You can't. You can't. You might be surprised to hear me saying that. Because you're saying, well, look, I've listened to this guy before and he all the time tells us we must trust in Jesus.

[18 : 00] Now he's telling us we can't. That's correct. That's absolutely true. It's a mystery.

It's a mystery that some people take to be a contradiction. And yet, as I say those two things, I find the two things in the Bible. On the one hand, you must trust in Jesus.

You must come to Jesus. You must accept what he has done for you. That's what it means to follow Jesus. On the other hand, you'll never do it until God awakens that concern in your own heart and until God brings you and draws you to Jesus Christ.

Well, you might say, well, that's it then. That's fine. I mean, it's up to God then and I'll just wait. No, you won't. I hope you don't. Because if you listen to the Lord, if you listen to Jesus, he says this.

He says, all that the Father gives to me will come to me. That's God's work. All that the Father gives to me will come to me. But he says this.

[19 : 06] And whoever comes to me, I will in no way drive away. You must listen to that. And you must come to Jesus in faith, turning away from your old life.

And you must come to him asking for his. And the very fact that God can save you, surely that's enough for you to say, well, if I can't do a thing to save myself, I pray that God will change my life.

Is that your prayer today? Is that your prayer? Knowing that you can't do a thing to change your life and to make yourself acceptable to God, are you then prepared to come to God in your nothingness, in your complete bankruptcy and emptiness, and ask him to do that great work in your life?

Do you know what? He will do it. Because he says, ask and you shall receive. Ask and you shall receive.

So don't get tied up in the complexity of what these verses are saying to us. The gospel remains the simplest message in the world. And yet, behind the gospel is the operation of God.

[20 : 23] So that when a person becomes a Christian, you would never say, well, I'm a Christian because I decided to follow Jesus. In one sense, that's true. But it's not you that have saved yourself.

God has saved you. And he's done everything for you. It began before even the world was created, Paul tells us in Ephesians chapter 1.

When he, out of the riches of his mercy and his grace, he devised the only way that was possible for men and women and boys and girls to be rescued from sin.

And the only way that that was was in sending his own son into the world. Jesus Christ, the second person of the Godhead, who became a human being and who came into the world with the purpose of laying down his life on the cross.

And all the agony that that included. With all the agony and the suffering and rising again from the dead. This was all God's doing. God so loved the world that he sent his only son so that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life.

[21 : 34] God did it all. And he will continue to do it all. The Bible tells us that if God has begun a good work in us, then he will see it through to the end. So that's the first thing I want us to see in that verse then.

For we are his workmanship. God's workmanship. Our salvation is God's. But don't make that an excuse to run away from God.

Knowing that God is able to save and knowing that God is willing to save, then you should be coming to him and asking for him to do that work that you can't do for yourself.

And as you ask him in faith, believing in Jesus Christ, he will do that work. The second thing I want us to see as we move on through the verse is the nature of that work.

We are his workmanship. Workmanship. And the whole scene of the studio comes into mind, doesn't it? Of the person who's painting a picture or sculpting something.

[22 : 39] The whole scene of a joiner's workshop, or rather I should say a carpenter's workshop. As the carpenter uniquely forms and forges and makes the work of his hands, the painstaking process, choosing out the materials and using his tools in a perfect and skilled way and not stopping until the product is made.

And only at last can he stand back and can he be pleased with what he has made. And that's the scene that's brought before us, the workshop. We are his workmanship.

But he goes on and he tells us the way in which that work takes place. It's a creation created in Christ Jesus.

In other words, it's not an improvement. I touched on that a few moments in time, but I want to touch on it again because somehow or other we seem to have this idea that a Christian is just a better person.

A Christian is not just a better person. A Christian is a new person. The person a Christian is is not the person he once was. That person is dead.

[23 : 56] Gone into the past. He's a has-been. Yesterday's man. Yesterday's woman. A person who's a Christian is not an improvement. We're not talking about a makeover.

We're not even talking about an extreme makeover. You know these popular programs that describe how you get this awful dull drab house and all these skilled craftsmen come in and they get to work on this house and they strip it down to the bare minimum and then they start filling it up again with a design and with a different build and colors and decorations that are expert decorations and then when the owners of the house come in again and they open their eyes, they take the scarf off their eyes and then they see, wow.

But you know, it's still the same house. At root, it's still the same. It might be a fantastic makeover, but it's still the same house. Or that program where they take old cars in America and they take old cars and then they get to work on these old cars and they strip them down and then they put all kinds of fancy things in them and then at the very end of a long, drawn-out process there's this gleaming, fantastic, new, all-function, singing, dancing sometimes literally singing, dancing new car.

And the owner goes, wow. But it's still the same car, isn't it? That's a makeover. No, that's not what God does. God's work is a creation.

There's a difference between a makeover and a creation and it's an important difference. It's important practically as well because there's something wrong with you as a Christian when someone's able to say, ah, he was like that before he was converted.

[25 : 46] If somebody said that to me, oh, he had that kind of temper before he was converted, I would be stopping and I would be saying, Lord, Lord, it has to go.

That's an area of my life that absolutely has to go. If it belongs to the past, it shouldn't be there. I want you to work at it and I want you to take it away and work on that. But a Christian is someone who has been created.

Have you ever been to one of these glassmaking factories? Or a potter? The Bible has a lot to say about the potter's workshop where the potter takes a lump of clay. That's all it is.

It's just this lump of clay. In the Bible, in the prophets, the prophecies in the Old Testament, it describes God's work as the craftsmanship of a potter.

It can take place either on a wheel or it can take place when the potter in his skill takes his lump of clay and you wouldn't think that anything beautiful could be made out of that and he gets to work at it.

[26 : 53] He takes his tools and he begins to shape it and form it and fashion it. And at first you have no idea what he's making, but he knows. He knows. You've got to keep in mind, you've got to trust in him that he knows what he's making and eventually day after day, hour after hour, something comes into view and then he has to put it in the oven to fire it.

Has to glaze it. And it has to go into the oven in order for it to be perfected and then he paints it. That's the kind of vision we have, but that's a creation.

When you take a lump of clay that is nothing and you're creating something for the first time, that's what God has done in us. That's why David said to God, create in me, Lord, a clean heart.

Not change the heart I've got, but create in me a clean heart, Lord. It's not an improvement.

It's a brand new creation. Paul said this, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creation. A new creation. The old has gone into the past.

[28 : 00] Behold, all things have become new. That's the second thing then. That's the nature of God's workmanship. We talked about the source and we talked about the nature.

I want us to talk about how this takes place then. It tells us, we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus. And that's very important.

It's in Christ Jesus. If you go back to the previous words in the chapter, the emphasis on what the Christian life is, is in Jesus Christ.

Look at what he says. But God, verse 4, being rich in mercy because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, what? He says, it made us alive, but he doesn't put us full stop there.

Our life is a life together with Christ. What defines the Christian life is not just that it's a new life, but it's a together life.

[29 : 03] A life in which a person is joined and united once and for all with Jesus Christ, in Jesus Christ. In other words, Christ is now my life and my life is in Jesus Christ.

I cannot be separated from him. That's what Jesus said when he said, I am the true vine and you are the branches. Do you think of your life as an individual on your own?

Do you tend to sort of just fall into the way of thinking when you wake up in the morning that you're just an individual person and God is there, but he's kind of detached from you in some way?

The Bible gives a very different picture when it comes to the life of the Christian. It tells us that Christ goes with us everywhere as someone who is joined with us. Now, all of these things are leading to a very important conclusion, aren't they?

Then the conclusion is this, that if I am a Christian, I'm not just to think of myself as someone who is forgiven or as someone who lives by faith in Jesus, these are true.

[30 : 11] But I am to think of myself as every day someone who is in Jesus Christ and someone in whom God is shaping and forming and who God has planned for a particular purpose.

purpose. And I want us to close with that this morning. Time has gone past. God has created us for a reason.

He has recreated us in Jesus Christ for a reason. And it's given to us here. We are created in Jesus Christ for good works. For good works.

God had a plan and a purpose in mind not just to form something within us but to prepare us and to create us for a particular purpose.

And that purpose wasn't random because it tells us which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

[31 : 14] Now what does that tell us? It tells us first of all that each one of us has been placed in this world for the time in which we are alive.

In other words it's no accident that you and I are here today. It's no accident that you and I belong to the same fellowship that we're worshipping together that we live in Stornoway today.

Why? Because God has a purpose for us in our places of work in our homes in our communities wherever we are you don't have some people will go abroad to serve the Lord of course that's true but the Lord has a purpose for us a job for us to do a reason for us where we are and God has actually prepared everything there's no such thing as random happenings with God this verse tells us that the works that God has created for us to do they've been created already in other words think about this can you it's really bigger it really beggars our imagination it really stretches our imagination doesn't it to think of God before even the world was and he can see into the future and not only see but he has planned into the future in his mysterious providence he knows what our lives are going to be like he knows what we have been given to do and he has he has arranged for them to be done by us he has planned and prepared beforehand that we should walk in them what is that purpose well as the purpose is what I said before to the children you are the salt of the earth said Jesus if the salt loses its flavor how can it be made salty again you are the light of the world do not put your light under a bed where no one can see the light but make sure it is seen and that means that as we go about our daily business we do so as representatives of Jesus

Christ we do so reflecting with lives that reflect that Jesus who loved us by his grace and gave himself for us and if we have received God's kindness and his grace how can that not produce within us lives that point to Jesus in the way that we live and behave and speak and deal with one another the way we conduct ourselves it means also that we use and make use of opportunities to share the gospel with others it horrifies me when I hear people who think that sharing the gospel is only for the elders and the minister and the missionaries who God has called that's not true God has called all of us to take what we have and to use opportunity to look for the opportunities that we have perhaps they don't come very often but when they do come are we ready for them to show to others the Christ who has changed our lives and to point them in the direction of the

Bible to encourage them to bring them to church good works what about helping others look at what Jesus did the compassion which he showed to those whose circumstances were less fortunate to the poor to the lame to the blind to those who were outcasts he always had time for people and he had always a concern for the lost and for the poor in this world is that our concern today these are the works that Jesus wants us and demands of us if any man would come after me he says he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me and it's a very humbling thought isn't it as we look at our own lives today in Jesus and we think of God working within us tirelessly determined day by day as it were going back into the workshop where he has begun that good work and he won't he's got an end in mind it's not finished yet but he won't stop until he finishes it we are already his workmanship in the sense that when a ship is launched after it's launched there's a number of months when the ship has to be perfected before it can go to sea nevertheless it has been launched it's a real ship it's a real work of art it's a real vessel which one day will do everything that it has been designed to do in the same way a

[36 : 42] Christian can say that he has been launched by God but God is working to perfect us inside and to bring about that character that corresponds with Jesus Christ fashioned and formed to his image that's what we pray for isn't it that's what we long for isn't it in this world to be made to the image of Jesus Christ let's pray our father in heaven we give thanks for your time together for your word to us we thank you Lord for the encouragement that the Bible gives us for the challenge that it presents to us for the truth in which we are made to see what we have been made in Jesus Christ we ask oh Lord that you continue to strive with us that the Holy Spirit will continue to lead and guide us into all truth and that you will forgive us where we have gone wrong and where we have been disobedient in refusing to cooperate with the work that you are doing in our hearts oh Lord we pray that you will chastise us and that you will lead us and guide us in everything and forgive our sin in Jesus name

Amen