

Ephesians 2.10

Grace and Good Works

I once saw a contraption in the store window that I just couldn't figure. It had all sorts of gears, tracks, levers, cups, chains—almost any basic piece of machinery that you could imagine. Then there was this ball bearing, about the size of a large marble that just moved up and down and across this contraption. What I couldn't figure was the purpose for this machine. I stood there for a few moments just watching it “work” waiting to see what it would accomplish. After a while I deduced that the only thing it had accomplished that day was to entertain my curiosity for a few minutes. While it was in constant motion, looking very busy and industrious, at the end of the day, it had no other purpose than to stay in motion. It didn't produce anything. It didn't power anything. It didn't clean anything. It didn't staple anything or print anything. And after a few minutes it wasn't even interesting or entertaining. It was just in a constant fuss about nothing. It served no purpose that I could discern.

That contraption made me think about the Church and the Christian life. I wondered how many people, maybe even Christians, looked at the Church with the same puzzlement that I had over that contraption. How many people conceived of the Christian life with the disillusionment of Macbeth when he said, “Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player That struts and frets his hour upon the stage And then is heard no more: it is a tale Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, Signifying nothing.” How great is the propensity toward such a view of the Christian's life when so many are under the impression that being a Christian is something they did one day when they obtained their ticket to heaven. Now they're just standing in the station, waiting for their bus to arrive. While many believers would deny that Christianity is nothing more than fire insurance, they are not living as though something radical has happened to them. Perhaps you are not living as though something radical has happened to you. Do you—if you are truly a Christian—do you believe that something radical *has* happened to you? Are you living as though something radical has happened to you? Are you living with purpose? Now I know that the idea of “purpose” and “the purpose driven life” and the “purpose driven Church” has been talked about so much that those of us who've been in Christian circles for a while are numb to the very thought. But our text this morning speaks of purpose. In fact, the word “for” introduces a purpose clause into Paul's statement about God's workmanship in your life. You were saved—you were shown grace—for a purpose. “We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus, *for good works*, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” God did not create you in Christ Jesus to be a purposeless contraption, always doing, but never doing anything meaningful. He created you for His glory. He saved you for His glory. He has prepared a life for you that is to be lived today. The point that Paul is making is not just that you should have a sense of purpose in life. Hitler had a sense of purpose. Mussolini had a sense of purpose. Lots of people have a sense of purpose. God did not send His Son to die for you so that you could simply have a sense of purpose, but so that you would fulfill *the* purpose for which you were created—to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.

God's saving grace gives you and me a reason to live, a purpose prepared by God, summed up in the words “for good works which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” God's grace did not cease toward you once your conversion was accomplished. Not only did God make you alive in Christ and give you faith to believe; He has made you a new creation for a holy purpose. Verse 10 says, “**For we are His workmanship.**” Our English word “poem” derives from this Greek word translated “workmanship.” It does not mean “poem,” but it has the connotation of a work that points to wisdom and skill in a craft. Some commentators prefer the translation “masterpiece” to highlight this nuance. A few years ago I participated in the funeral of a man here in Fayetteville that built a lot of the homes in Fayetteville in the 70s, 80s, and 90s. Everyone talked about his precise work with molding. They said he was so good at fitting molding that he never carried a caulking gun with him to a job. Those who knew his work could go into a home and know that it was built by him just by studying the molding. He was a true craftsman. His workmanship was so distinct and so good that it pointed to him as the craftsman. Paul says, “We are God's workmanship.” So, when people study our lives they should be able to discern the handiwork of God. If Psalm 19 can say “the heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky

above proclaims His handiwork,” how much more should it be said of us, who are new creations in Christ Jesus, that we proclaim His handiwork. If day after day the heavens pour out speech, and night after night the sky above proclaims His handiwork, wouldn’t you suppose that God intends the Redeemed of His highest creation to point to His workmanship?

How is God’s workmanship identified? Well, we are **“created in Christ Jesus.”** Our new creation came about by our union with Christ. We were united to Him in His death, which was a death to sin. We were united with Him in His resurrection from the dead, so that we might live to God. We were united with Him in His ascension and His enthronement in heaven over the spiritual forces of wickedness. Our new life is a life born out of and lived in this union with Christ Jesus. So, our lives are being conformed more and more to the image of Christ. Now, to be conformed to Christ does not mean that we will have His same physical appearance, beard and all. It means that we will be holy as He is holy. It means that we will love the things He loves and hate the things He hates. It means we will enjoy the blessed love of the Father as joint-heirs with Christ.

So when we see **“for good works”** in the next line, we have an idea of what those good works are. Every religion and philosophy has an ethic that comes from it, whether it is formally and explicitly appended to the system of thought or not. The immorality endorsed by our society resulted not only from the rejection of Christianity, but also from the embrace of naturalism and secular humanism. These philosophies are not amoral; they have an ethical code that arises from them. When we say “good works,” that may bring all sorts of different things to mind based on one’s world view. But we must understand these “good works” in light of our union with Christ.

The kinds of good works that Paul has in mind are related in the second half of this epistle. Ephesians is like several of Paul’s letters. The first part spells out what God has done and who we are, while the second part tells us how we should live and what we should be about—indicative then imperative. So, Ephesians 1-3 tells us what God has done and who we are because of what God has done; and 4-6 tells us how we should then live. In that second section, Paul describes the Christian life within the community of the church, in the broader community, in the home, as well as in the interior of the heart. There is quite a bit of instruction for these areas of our lives. Now, we’ve already established that we are not saved by our works. We are saved by grace through faith. So, works are *not* the ground or cause of our salvation. They *are* one of the *purposes* of our salvation, as Paul says in verse 10: “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus *for* good works.” I believe it was Calvin who said, “We are saved by grace alone, but the grace that saves is never alone.” Or, “We are justified by faith alone, but the faith that justifies is never alone.” As James, the brother of our Lord, would say, “Faith without works is dead” (**James 2.26**).

Now, Paul closes this section with a good balance of God’s sovereignty and human responsibility. God’s sovereignty is again trumpeted in these words, **“which God prepared beforehand.”** We have already seen the language of “chosen before the foundation of the world” and “predestined.” So it is not surprising to see this concept of predestination here. In fact, this is really just another way of saying what he said in chapter one verse four, “even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world that we should be *holy and blameless* before Him.” Is it any wonder that the God who predestined that we should be holy and blameless would prepare beforehand good works for us? So, not only is our new birth or regeneration predestined as the beginning of our experience of salvation. And, not only is our glorification predestined as the goal of our experience of salvation. But our progressive sanctification, our Christian living, is also part of that sovereign decree before the worlds in order stood. God is the ground and cause of your sanctification—your progress in holiness—your good works.

Now, lest we should all become hyper-Calvinists, and just “let go and let God,” Paul also speaks of our responsibility: **“that we should walk in them.”** We are to walk. This closes this section from chapter two verse one to verse ten. In verses one and two we “were dead in trespasses and sins in which you once walked.” Now, we are alive in Christ and have a new walk. Knowing that salvation is all of grace, we know that our new walk is not energized by the flesh or accomplished by mere human effort. This walk is enabled by God’s saving grace. Paul said to the **Philippians**, “And I am

sure of this, that He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (1.6). Knowing that God is still at work in us is motivation for us to persevere and to seek to grow in Christ-likeness. Again, in **Philippians**, Paul said, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure" (2.12-13). We pursue holiness because we know that God is behind all of our efforts, energizing them by the Holy Spirit and shaping them by the paradigm of Christ, the Firstborn of many brothers.

Little children, do you know the song "He's Still Workin' on Me." The chorus goes like this: *He's still workin' on me, to make me what I oughta be. It took Him just a week to make the moon and the stars, the sun and the earth, and Jupiter and Mars. How loving and patient He must be! He's still workin' on me! He's still working on you.*

So how's your walk, Christian? A radical change has come about. Radical means "right down to the roots" or "right to the heart." That means that no area of your life is unaffected by God's grace. Are you seeing some good works produced in your life? How is your attitude toward your fellow Christians, especially those you covenanted with here at CCPC? How is your relationship with your neighbors? Romans says, "As much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men." How is your love toward your wife, husband? How is your respect toward your husband, wife? Children, how is that "obey your parents in the Lord" bit going for you? Teenager, are you honoring your father and mother in the choices you make and in the way you relate to them? How about in the way you talk about them when they're not around? All of our relationships are to be characterized by love. Just listen to these exhortations from chapter four: "bearing with one another in love;" "speaking the truth in love;" "builds itself up in love;" "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you." Is love characteristic of your relationships? How is that battle with temptation? Who has the upper hand, you or that besetting sin? Are you resisting the devil, firm in the faith?

Why don't you take some time this afternoon for some self-examination? Ask the Lord to reveal any waywardness in you. Ask Him to remove every wicked way from you. Ask Him to increase your love. Thank Him for the good works He has prepared beforehand that you should walk in them. Thank Him for the grace of perseverance. Remember, this is not good works from self-effort. You are *God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand* that you should walk in them. So abide in His Word—His life-giving and life-transforming Word. Pray always in the Holy Spirit. Do everything from an attitude of faith, depending on God.

Tertullian, the early Christian apologist, noted that the pagans would marvel at the Christians they were persecuting, saying, "See how they love one another! They are ready to lay down their lives for each other." It would take centuries to come to fruition, but little by little people began to see the handiwork of God in the lives of these early believers who had the faith to convert an empire. Jesus said, "Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (**Matthew 5.16**). Is your light lit by God's grace? Are you fanning it into flame by Word and Spirit? God's saving grace promotes humility and enables good works.