

2 Cor 5:17-18 “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, and see, the new has come! ¹⁸ Everything is from God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation.”

Good morning CCC. We are beginning a new series today title **His Workmanship**. During this series we’ll be exploring what the Scripture says about who and what God has made us. Today, we’re looking at Ephesians 2:1-10 to understand what God has made us to do.

I was listening the other day again to the testimony of my favorite Theologian Scholar, Dr. William L. Craig, and I just was struck by his story about how he became a practicing scholar and philosopher. He got a MA degree and found out there was a scholarship at a very prestigious and well-respected university in Europe. They only took a handful of students into this full ride scholarship and to get in you had to write a letter, give them a proposal of what you wanted to study—he and his wife wrote it up—sent it off and daily just committed to praying that God would open the door. When he got word that he had been accepted in this very exclusive group he was blown away—surprised by the goodness and grace of Jesus.

I listened to that story again and thought about times when I trusted the Lord for something, committed it to prayer, and when I got the news, or the prayer was answered what a shock it was to hear News so good, that the answer of “yes, I want that for you” surprised me.

Folks, today we are looking at a passage where the news is so good—it’s shockingly good. There’s a part of us that thinks that the news might be too good to be true.

Now for sure this astonishingly good news involves some equally dreadful bad news. The badness of the bad news makes the goodness of the good news all the more sweet and surprising.

Let’s start where Paul does—bad news first...

Paul first tells us about...

1. Our hopeless predicament. vv. 1-3. If ever there was a hopeless situation—a lost cause—we are it.

- We were dead in sin. v. 1

“And you were dead in your trespasses and sins”

Now, in 11-14 he defines what he means by “death”—here it is Semitic idea of estrangement from the family; or a non-member of the covenant. We see that this is what he means in his summary statement starting in verse 11.

2:11 “So, then, remember that at one time you were Gentiles in the flesh—called “the **uncircumcised**” by those called “**the circumcised**,” ... **excluded from the citizenship** of Israel, and **foreigners to the covenants** of promise, without hope and without God in the world... for he made **both groups** one and tore down the **dividing wall of hostility.**”

- We were dominated by the sinful nature. vv. 2-3

“in which you previously walked according to the ways of this world, according to the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit now working in the disobedient. ³We too all previously lived among them in our fleshly desires, carrying out the inclinations of our flesh and thoughts”

A life that is cut off from the family—without God and without hope in the world—is hopelessly governed by sinful desires.

- We were damned to wrath and certain judgment. v. 3b.

“and we were by nature children under wrath as the others were also.”

This wrath was baked into the cake—the world and human beings stand judged.

Jesus said that the one who doesn’t believe in him stands condemned already.

Illus. We were born into a condemned building. The walls are falling down around us. The floor is about to give way. The pipes are rusted and infrastructure is turning to sawdust due to the termite infestation.

Paul then turns his attention to the best possible, life changing news we could have received...

2. God's extravagant gift—salvation.—So the bad news is as bad as it could be. We are dead, cut off, without God and without hope—driven by sin.

- God's character v. 4a.

"But God who is **rich in mercy...**"

We're under his wrath—damned forever. We need the judge's clemency.

And it turns out, he's got the wherewithal—the heavenly resources to meet our need.

Illus. I was a teenager from the wrong side of the tracks. I had this friend named Margot whose family was wealthy. I'd go hang out at her home and I just couldn't believe the opulence she lived in compared to my humble little house over in Lakeside, Richmond.

Her parents would pay my way every year so that I could go with the mission's team to foreign countries and share the Gospel and my story of Jesus's love. **I intuitively knew that the rich guy had the means.** And God is "rich" in mercy toward his creation. This word rich conveys the idea of excess, a surplus, or an abundance of provision. God is not hurting for the resources needed to save us—he's not "mercy strapped."

- God's motive v.4b.

"because of his **great love** that he had for us"

"so that in the coming ages he might **display the immeasurable riches of his grace** through his kindness to us in Christ Jesus." v. 7.

Essentially God has two motives for showing us mercy even though we were lost—his **great love** for us and his own **glory in displaying** us as trophies of his immeasurable grace. God's love is immeasurable and incomparable. God desires to show the full extent of his grace to us and put it on display in the coming ages. Believe it or not, God wants to display the power of his grace in your messed-up situation.

But it's one thing to be rich—it's another thing to express one's wealth extravagantly.

Illus. When Joseph Leek died in 2003 he left several million dollars to an organization that provides guide dogs for the blind. That's not unusual—people leave their millions to charity all the time—his children were shocked, not that he left his money to guide dogs, but that he had any money to leave to anything.

According to his daughters, Joseph Leek lived like a pauper—penniless to all who observed. He would watch TV at the neighbors house so as to conserve electricity. He pinched every penny, living in a shack falling down around him in need of repair—he was a rich man living a poverty-stricken life.

God is not like that. God is not a chincey tight wad when it comes to mercy. God has the wherewithal to meet the need.

God not only has the resources to meet the need, he's a bit of a spend thrift. He went all out to get us a gift that cost him dearly. The death of his one and only Son from eternity. God is rich, but he's also an extravagant giver.

- God's initiative v. 5-6

"He made us alive with Christ even though we were dead in trespasses. You are saved by grace! **6. He also raised us up** with him and **seated us with him** in the heavens in Christ Jesus," God is the one who takes the initiative to rescue the person who is already dead.

This gift of salvation is of God's own initiative. He sought us when we were not seeking him. He loved us while we were enemies of his cross and far from him. He took all the initiative to create us and to provide for our salvation.

God acts first—he meets us at the point of our need and our hopelessness. He resurrects that which is dead. He restores those who are cut off and without God or hope in the world.

Paul then tells us about...

3. The means of our salvation vv. 8-9.

- By the means of God's grace through the instrumentality of faith v. 8b.

“For you are saved by grace through faith”

This phrase communicates both the means and instrumentality of salvation. We are saved by an act of free grace in which God saves us.

The apparatus that administers that cure is the instrumentality of faith.

In order to save us three things have to be present:

- **Means:** God alone provides the means of our salvation—this is an act of free grace by the initiative of God.

- **Instrumentality:** God administers this gift through the instrumentality of faith—which is trusting reception.

- **Agency:** A human being who expresses their faith in what is offered—trusting reception (Jn 1:12 “TO ALL who believed in him, to all who received him he gave the right to become the children of God)—requires an agent who can receive it.

In case there was any doubt as to what he is not talking about, that salvation is...

- Not through the instrumentality of “works” v. 8b-9a.

“and this is not from yourselves; it is God's gift—⁹ not from works, so that no one can boast.”

Paul makes two things impossible with this statement:

(1) it is impossible for anyone to ever take credit or brag that they had anything whatsoever to do with their salvation. Why, because both the gift and the ability to receive the gift all come from God. There is no aspect of our salvation that we can take credit for. If we could then we could have bragging rights.

(2) Paul makes it impossible for anyone to define faith as a “work” of our righteousness. No sooner does he mention faith, he contrasts it to our works.

Rom 3:26-28 “God presented him to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so that he would be just and justify the one who has faith in Jesus. Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of principle? By one of works? No, on the contrary, by a principle of faith.

²⁸ For we conclude that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law.”

Paul concludes by referring to...

4. The nature of this extravagant salvation v. 10.

- We are God's "work." v. 10a.

"For we are his workmanship" (*poiema*: meaning "creation"). This word *poiema* from which we get the word "poem" does not mean, as some have imagined "a work of art." A mere work of art is a showpiece only. Put on display. Now, Paul has said that God intends to display us as trophies of his immeasurable goodness. But we are more than mere showpieces we are "functional art."

Illus. Functional art is a highly crafted artistic creation that can perform utilitarian jobs. Functional art exists in that space between something created merely for aesthetic and display purposes (high art), and something created simply to function as a tool (like a drill).

Instead, *poiema* is a piece of art that has a function or utility, like an **ornate vase beautifully decorated** but still useful for pouring water.

Or like a **finely crafted, handmade musical instrument**. It's beautiful to look at, but it also has the function of playing a tune.

So, this word he chooses here deliberately conveys the idea that we are God's creation—combining aesthetic beauty with usability/functionality.

We are what God has made us. We are his useful art.

- God's "work" is "creation" v.10b.

"created in Christ Jesus"

The act of "creation" or "re-creation" is God's alone. This gift of salvation is the work of God.

Illus. Jesus was sitting in a house that was packed to the rafters with people. The implication of the story is that he immediately outgrew the synagogue and had to find a larger, multi-family home. Some people brought their paralyzed friend to be healed by Jesus but they couldn't get through the front gate to the courtyard. With crowds pressing in to hear and watch Jesus—the friends of the paralytic went up the outside stairs to the roof and found a place where they could lower their friend through to Jesus. Jesus was astonished by their faith and said, "Take heart son. Your sins are forgiven." The religious leaders in the crowd were offended "Blasphemy. who does this man think he is?" Jesus, reading their thoughts responded, "Who but God could heal this man? So that you might know that I have the authority to do the thing you can't see "forgiveness" I will do the thing you can see" and Jesus told the man to get up and take his mat. When the man was healed it was clear to all whom Jesus claimed to be. Immanuel, God who is among us.

Now at issue in the story is what God can do vs. what man can do. Mere men did not have the authority nor the power to forgive and heal that paralytic. But God does have the authority and the power to forgive and heal us.

What Paul is getting at here in the Eph. passage is this very thing—what is God's work? What is it that only God can do? The work of forgiving a sinner and wiping the slate clean. The work of creating us for a purpose...

- God's "creation" was made for "good works" 10c.

"for good works which God prepared in advance for us to do."

Paul has described salvation as resurrection from the dead and restoration to God's family. People who are dead cannot make themselves alive. People who are exiled cannot restore themselves to right relationship.

He has described salvation as freedom from the captivity of sin—people who are imprisoned and condemned cannot free themselves.

He now describes salvation in terms of creation and re-creation—Just as the worlds were called into being in Genesis 1 now the believer becomes new creation at the decree and action of God.

As God's handiwork, his creation, we were made to work.

If I made clocks I would expect them tick off the seconds and minutes of the day.

If I made guitars I would expect to resonate with sound when plucked by a skilled player.

If I made cars I would expect them to fire up and move when driven.

If I made Christians I would expect them to act and love and speak the truth the way Jesus Christ did.

You are not saved by works but are God's workmanship.

The "good works" here refers to the effort God has predestined in the Christian life.

The good works of letting our light shine in darkness...

Jesus said in Matt 5:16: "In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven" We are to be "salt" and "light" in a dark and vulgar society in the hope that people will glorify God.

The mission of the Outreach Team is to encourage and provide opportunities for believers at CCC to develop relationships with non-believers outside the church walls, with an on-going hope of evangelism and discipleship.

The vision of the Outreach Team is that most non-Christians within a 50-mile radius will have a friendship with a vibrant believer who encourages them to accept God's grace and become more like Christ.

The good work of sound teaching...

To teachers, Paul wrote...

Titus 2:7 "Make yourself an example of good works with integrity and dignity in your teaching. ⁸Your message is to be sound beyond reproach, so that any opponent will be ashamed, because he doesn't have anything bad to say about us."

Teachers help to maintain the integrity of the Church as they exemplify the good works of teaching sound doctrine to God's people.

The good work of godly living...

Titus 2:11-14 “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, ¹² instructing us to deny godlessness and worldly lusts and to live in a sensible, righteous, and godly way in the present age, ¹³ while we wait for the blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. ¹⁴ He gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to cleanse for himself a people for his own possession, eager to do good works.”

If God makes a Christian he expects that believer to live and love and look like Jesus.