

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

For reply: Email: truthfortoday@aol.com

Broadcast Date: 6 December 1998

No. T0035

Speaker: Mr. George Stevens

The Epistle to the Ephesians: Ephesians 2:1-22 - God’s Handiwork

The key verse of Ephesians 2 seems to be Ephesians 2:10 which states: “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.” Hence, the title of “God’s Handiwork”. It is a handiwork which includes

- **The Power of God (Ephesians 2:1-10)**
- **The Sacrifice of Christ (Ephesians 2:11-18)**
- **The Building through the Spirit (Ephesians 2:19-22)**

The three Persons of the Godhead are fully involved in this work.

In Ephesians 1, we saw the divine counsel and purpose concerning the Church in the matter of election, predestination and inheritance; here we see the rotten material upon which God had to work. The Apostle’s repeated use of the word “together” throughout the passage shows us that the material was composed of both Jews and Gentiles. Morally, both were “dead” in trespasses and sins. Nevertheless, by the intervention of God they were made alive and, in the future, they will display the exceeding riches of God’s grace (Ephesians 1:7). The chapter goes on to describe how, in time past, the uncircumcision (or Gentiles) were apart from Christ, alienated from the covenants, strangers who had no hope and were without God. But, having been brought near, together with believing Jews, they will be seen as an holy temple in the Lord (Ephesians 1:21).

The Power of God (Ephesians 2:1-10)

Let’s examine the power of God, active in Ephesians 2:1-10, in more detail. Ephesians 2:1 presents us with the phrase “And you”. It specifically refers to the Ephesian Gentiles here. They were once dead in trespasses and sins. This means that, in the sight of God, they were seen as dead - totally unresponsive to Him and unable to respond - because of their trespasses and sins. A “trespass” speaks of a falling aside from uprightness and truth, while a “sin”, literally means ‘to miss the mark’. It is an act of disobedience to God which falls far short of His standard of holiness. That these degenerate Gentiles were later given life by God, however, is clear from Ephesians 2:5 where they are quickened with Christ along with the Jewish Christians. Praise the Lord!

Ephesians 2:2 indicates that these Ephesians at one time actively walked in trespasses and sins, being carried along by the world’s ungodly standards and fashions which were popular during that age. Such ungodly standards remain with us today. Furthermore, the governing influence of this age was the “prince of the power of the air” (Ephesians 2:2). The prince is the devil, who is elsewhere called, “the prince of this world” (John 12:31); the power (or authority) is composed of the realm of evil spirits over which he rules; and the air is the sphere of their operation. We only have to look about us today in order to see that this world lies under the influence of the devil and is in direct opposition to God. It is this influence which continues to work in the children of disobedience (Ephesians 2:2). The Apostle is really speaking of “sons” here rather than “children” because a son implies character and dignity, whereas a child suggests nature and dependence. These sons had no regard for the will of God and were marked by disobedience or wilful unbelief.

Despite the blessings showered upon the Jew, and his place of favour before the Lord, he was no different from the Gentile in his behaviour. This is emphasised in Ephesians 2:3. The phrase “also we all” refers to the Jew, and “even as others” to the Gentile. Among those sons of disobedience, the Jews also had their manner of life, going to and fro (in time past) in the lusts of their flesh. Their disobedience to God is seen in that their aims in life were self-satisfaction, self-righteousness and self-glory. These desires were seen as they were doing the things willed by both the flesh and the mind. The works of the flesh are listed in Galatians 5:19-21 and include things like adultery, fornication, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, anger, envyings, drunkenness, revellings along with murders and such like. Those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God (Galatians 5:21). The desires of the mind are reasoned choices being made with total disregard to the will of God, even though they may appear to be civilised and even wise in human eyes.

The Jews were also children of wrath (Ephesians 2:3). That means their nature was also sinful. As a result they too came under the wrath of God. Wrath expresses the settled attitude of anger which God has for persons who are still in their sinful state. It doesn’t matter how privileged we might be, as descendants of Adam we are all laid bare to the judgement of God.

In Ephesians 2:4-5, we see that God was motivated to act on behalf of Paul and others because of the great love which he had for them. He loved them even when they were unlovely, morally dead and completely corrupt. But then, real love always desires the best for the good of its object. It was this love which revealed God as being rich in mercy. If Jew and Gentile deserved wrath, God would exercise His wealth of mercy; and if they were dead on account of their trespasses and sins, He would quicken them together with Christ. (In God’s sight, this quickening - or being made alive - took place when He by His mighty power raised Christ from the dead). So the love of God expressed itself in compassion toward the undeserving. Paul emphasises this to the Ephesians by writing: “By grace ye are saved” (Ephesians 2:5). This is love in action. It is the power of grace that saves. And it is the same today! Praise His name!

But there is more found in Ephesians 2:6. In the purpose of God who is not limited by time, they were not only made alive with Christ, but they were raised up together with Him and made to sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. Having been made alive with Christ in His resurrection, there is also a sharing in Christ of all that was involved in His exaltation, except in His pre-eminence. Christ is established at the right hand of God in the heavenlies. This is the place of special favour and authority. We might say that the resurrection and exaltation of Christ both anticipates and guarantees our resurrection and the following glory. At the same time, they are the basis of our present blessings.

Ephesians 2:7 tells us why God has done this. “Throughout the ages to come, God will display in them the surpassing riches of His grace in His kindness toward them”. But it was neither grace nor kindness that gave the place of supremacy to Christ. It is His by right. Nonetheless, these Ephesian Christians would stand as trophies which are a time-lasting witness to the surpassing grace of God. Just as certificates, cups and shields in our cabinets are a witness to our achievements, so Christians shall be living witnesses to the achievements of God in grace. They will be living monuments to the fact that God so loved that He gave His only begotten Son (John 3:16). This grace was shown in God’s kindness and was channelled through Christ Jesus, the now glorified Man.

In Ephesians 2:8, Paul again addresses the Ephesians in order to emphasise the fact that it was by God’s grace they had been saved. He adds to his former statement in Ephesians 2:5 that this salvation is “through faith”. Since it is by faith, works of any kind are excluded (Ephesians 2:9). Not one who is found in heaven will be able to say, “I did it my way.” The whole process of salvation is the mighty work of God. Everything related to it comes to us as a gift of God, just as it did to the Ephesians. To God be the glory!

Isaiah tells us that the so-called good works unbelieving people do are like filthy rags in the sight of God. No-one in heaven will boast in their own works to gain salvation. God has done it all through Christ.

This brings us to Ephesians 2:10 which is the key statement for the whole chapter. “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.” Here the emphasis is still upon God, for we are His workmanship - the product formed from a beautiful design. What a masterpiece! As such we are a “new creation in Christ Jesus” with a view to doing good works. A good work is motivated by love and done in accordance to the will of God. Such a work always brings glory to God. Though works are not a means to salvation, they are a necessary proof of it. “Faith without works is dead!” says James in his epistle (James 2:26). In the Old Testament the whole body of laws relating to conduct was called the “*Halacha*”. The word means: “The Walking”. These good works in which we should walk, not only surpass the Law of Moses, but also precede it. They were “before ordained” by God. The importance of good works by a Christian cannot therefore be over-stressed. Christ is the One who empowers us to do such works and, of course, He is the perfect example of how to do them. If you have time after this broadcast, read Luke 24:19, John 13:14-15, Acts 2:22 and 1 Peter 2:21. Good works are the very opposite to trespasses and sins. Yet everything in God’s masterpiece depended upon the Sacrifice of Christ.

The Sacrifice of Christ (Ephesians 2:11-18)

In God’s previous dealings the Jews are described as being “nigh” (Ephesians 2:13). That is to say, God had to some degree brought them into a privileged position of knowing Him and His ways; but they had rejected Him. How often in the history of Israel have the people been seen to fall away from God and even take to worshipping idols! The Gentiles were seen as being “afar off”. They did not know God in the same way of relationship. They were not among the previously chosen people of God. So there was a real division between Jew and Gentile. Each despised and hated the other. Yet, as we have seen in Ephesians 2:1-10, both being dead are made alive, and, in Ephesians 2:11-18, those afar off are made near. In fact, if we look onwards in this section, we find that through the sacrifice of Christ both are made one and at peace with each other (Ephesians 2:14); both are reconciled or brought back to God (Ephesians 2:16); and both have access to the same Father (Ephesians 2:18).

The wonder of divine grace toward us is best understood by contrasting what we are now in relation to what we once were. In Ephesians 2:11, Paul reminds the Ephesians that they were “Gentiles” as distinct from the favoured nation of Israel. This is what they were “in the flesh”, which means by natural descent. They were called, perhaps contemptuously, “Uncircumcision” by those who were called “Circumcision”. Belonging to the nations they did not have the mark of circumcision (the cutting off of the foreskin of the penis). This was the physical sign of the covenant between Israel and God. It was a mark “made by hands” to contrast it with the spiritual circumcision of this day of grace where Christians judge themselves and their works before God in a spiritual way.

Paul then reminds the Ephesians of their past condition (Ephesians 2:12). They were “without Christ” at that time. This means they were apart from Him as Israel’s promised Messiah, as well as the Saviour. They were also aliens from the commonwealth of Israel (Ephesians 2:12). This shows that they were separate from the rights and privileges that Israel had under God’s blessing. They were “strangers” in that they didn’t know the benefits which came with the promises of God made to Israel through Abraham, Moses or David. Furthermore, they had “no hope”. There was no prospect of a future inheritance nor any present anticipation of it. Finally, they were “without God in the world”, (Ephesians 2:12). In other words, they did not know the true and living God. As one has written, they were “Christless, stateless, friendless, hopeless and Godless” (William Hendriksen)

In Ephesians 2:13, Paul shows them their present position. They were now in Christ Jesus. They were vitally united to the risen exalted Saviour. They shared in Him the blessings of God with the believing Jews. Not under the Law of old; but with the freedom that the Son of God gives in grace. But Paul reminds them that the cost of their blessing was the blood of Christ. It is the inestimable value and eternal effect of that precious blood which has brought them into blessing. They had been accepted by God in the worth of His beloved Son who had atoned for their souls. There could be no such union without this sacrifice.

As a result of this, Christian, Jew and Gentile can look by faith to the exalted Christ and say: “He is our peace” (Ephesians 2:14). He is the Prince of Peace (see Isaiah 9:6). United in Christ, they have peace with one another. Christ has broken down the barrier that separated them. They have been made one in their relation to God and to each other. The hostility that existed between Jew and Gentile has, in the sphere of Christianity, been nullified. The hatred, caused by the separating wall of Ephesians 2:14, identified later as the ceremonial law, the “law of commandments contained in ordinances”, (Ephesians 2:15) has gone. This law consisted of the rules and regulations with respect to the feasts, fasts, foods, offerings, circumcision and similar aspects of the religious side of Judaism. Christ abolished the hostility in His flesh, that is, by the offering up of His body in sacrifice. God not only sent His Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sacrifice for sin (Romans 8:3), but He sent Him forth, made of a woman and made under the law, in order that He could not only fulfil that law in His life, but, through the cross, redeem those who were under it from its curse (see Galatians 3:13). Having been made a curse on Golgotha’s tree (Galatians 3:13), He is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. The glorious result is that, in the Church, there is no longer “the twain”, Jew and Gentile, but a new creation (See 2 Corinthians 5:17) in the risen and exalted Christ. This “new creation” is today “one new man”. It describes Jew and Gentile as being united. It is “one” in contrast to “twain” (Ephesians 2:15). It is “new” in that there was never anything like this before. Christianity has its own culture - all Jewish and Gentilish features are gone.

The use of the word “man” emphasises the union of the seed of the woman in general (see Genesis 3:15) and the seed of Abraham (See Galatians 3:16-29). Both are now combined in a new kind of man who bears the likeness of the last Adam (1 Corinthians 15:45) - the Lord Jesus Christ. So, Paul adds, “making peace” (Ephesians 2:15). The converted Jew and Gentile look back to the cross and gratefully acknowledge that it was there that peace was made between them.

Not only have both been made one (Ephesians 2:14), but in Ephesians 2:16 we find that both have been reconciled in one body to God. The distance between both Jew and Gentile has been completely removed so that they are formed into one body. But the distance between them and God has also been removed. This has been effected by the cross. The blood of Christ for our guilt makes us nigh. His flesh in death annuls the hostility between Jew and Gentile caused by the ceremonial law. Now, by the cross, the hatred between Jew and Gentile has not just been annulled, but it has been slain - judged once and for all. So has the hatred of both parties towards God. The Christian can say, “I am crucified with Christ” (Galatians 2:20).

Christ, on the throne, is our peace (Ephesians 2:14). He made peace (Ephesians 2:15) on the cross, in resurrection, He now comes and preaches peace (Ephesians 2:17). He preaches peace not only through His servants, but with them - just as He worked with the disciples after His ascension (Mark 16:20), both the Gentile Ephesians and the Jew heard the same good news.

The Building through the Spirit. (Ephesians 2:19-22)

Through the exalted Christ, both Jew and Gentile have access by one Spirit unto the Father. They are introduced to the Father in the intimacy of a personal relationship. This access, by means of the indwelling Spirit, shows that we may freely approach God the Father in order to take advantage of His favour towards us. It makes communion and prayer a continual privilege. There is no need to go through any “human” mediator!

In Ephesians 2:19, Paul emphasises to these Christians their united blessings both now and in the future. Their state was completely reversed.

- They were now in Christ - no longer Christless!
- They were fellow-citizens with the saints of God - no longer strangers!
- They were co-members in the household of God, part of a spiritual family - no longer aliens!

All Christians, everywhere, share in these blessings.

According to Ephesians 2:20, they were built upon the foundation laid by the Apostles and prophets in their teaching. These are Apostles and prophets in the primary sense. They were people who God gave as gifts to the Church and what they taught was God-breathed. Note that, in this foundation, the Lord Jesus is given the place of pre-eminence. He Himself is the chief corner stone (Ephesians 2:20). This is the strong angle stone which is set into the foundation. It has the primary place because from this stone other walls take their lines. It gives strength and character to the building. All the living stones (Christians) in this spiritual building are built in relation to Jesus Christ, the chief corner stone.

In Ephesians 2:21, Paul says they are “in” Jesus Christ, not simply “upon”. It is because of this that all the building harmoniously fitted together [grows or increases] unto an holy temple [or sanctuary] in the Lord. Every individual believer has his place in this sanctuary and every one fits perfectly. It is a sanctuary which is holy, that is to say cleansed and set apart to the purpose of God. As in the Old Testament temple, it is here that His beauty may be seen (Psalm 27:4), while every part of it utters glory. It was there that priestly service took place. It was there that every one spoke of His glory (Psalm 29:9). Ultimately, this sanctuary will be seen in completion as the holy city in the millennial period. Revelation 21:22 states that the whole city will be the sanctuary. It will be seen in all its glory.

The meaning of the word “habitation” in Ephesians 2:22 is “a permanent dwelling place”. God has dwelt in the Church, through His Spirit since the Day of Pentecost. What a humbling, yet glorious thought! And, what’s more, He lives there permanently! What a craftsman!

A prayer:

Gracious God our Father, we acknowledge that Your handiwork is awesome. There is nothing to compare with it. We just thank You for Your loving concern for us, rotten material that we were; for giving us real life; for making us a new creation in Your Son; for His great sacrifice; and, for Your indwelling Spirit who enables us to please You. Please, help us, as Christians, to live lives filled with good works which will bring praise to Your name and that of Your Son. Amen.

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