

God's Workmanship (Part 1)

Good Works

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This sermon is a spin-off from the previous series that I gave ["Forms vs. Spirituality"], and I am giving it because there are elements to this subject of *works* that I think we need to understand better.

Ephesians 2:8-10 For by grace are you saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God has before ordained that we should walk in them.

Sometimes some of us get things backwards, as though everything in this way of life that we call Christianity depends upon us. The effect of this is three-fold, but it is the first of these three effects which is the fountain from which the other two flow. This first one is that it puts a great deal of undue emphasis upon our works, and it suddenly puts God into the background.

The more important that our works are to salvation to us—the way we think about them—the less important God's Word becomes, and no man—this is the principle that is working against us—can serve two masters, because we will love the one, as Jesus said, and hate the other. If works means so much to us, then God and His Word suddenly begins to move into the background of importance.

From that major principle flow these other two. The second one, that as our specific knowledge of this way of life and the great height of God's standard accumulates within us, because of the way that human nature is, we begin to feel as though Christianity is a great burden rather than a liberating pleasure.

The third one is that we will begin to think of God as unreasonable, harsh, and demanding. This has become a factor in our lives to some extent because of having come strongly under the influence of Herbert Armstrong and the

Worldwide Church of God. Mr. Armstrong pushed works very hard, and well he should have, because the Bible makes a very strong case for works. But where do they fit? This is an important question because of the way that verse 8 in Ephesians 2 is written. "For by grace are you saved." It is written in the perfect tense. "By grace are you saved." Having been written by Paul in the perfect tense, it means that *they* (meaning the Ephesians) were spiritually saved at some point in the past, a point that is not mentioned there.

Please understand the importance of this. It means that they were spiritually saved at some point in the past and that they remained in that state up to the time of the writing. Now if we are saved at some point in the past by grace, and we are created *unto* good works, then just putting those two things together, you can begin to see that *good works* are something that occur *after* the saving actually takes place. A very important consideration.

Romans 2:13 For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified.

Again referring to Mr. Armstrong, he used to say that works will not save you, but only those who work will be saved. That thought was, and still is, true. That principle that Mr. Armstrong put before us and taught us was drawn from verses such as this here in Romans 2:13. If a person is not justified, he has no possibility of salvation, and this verse clearly says that only those who keep the law will be justified. Does that seem like a contradiction with Ephesians 2:8? The answer is *no*, because the Bible does not contradict itself. Scripture cannot be broken.

This statement in Romans 2:13 very neatly summed up Mr. Armstrong's belief in this area, but I am here to tell you that there is a great deal more to this subject than that succinct statement. We also must understand that Mr. Armstrong was first and foremost an evangelist to this world, and his main responsibility to God was speaking to the public in order to bring about the conversion of the people that God was calling. Now, all the public got in many cases were broad overviews of much more complex biblical teaching.

Unfortunately, in many cases church members did not have the subject explained to them more specifically either, and there are two possible places

where an error can be made in regard to the importance of works to God's plan. One is, if the local minister, in his teaching, did not fully understand works' purpose and their sources, then he was incapable of teaching it to others, and the complexities of this would have never been passed on. The second one is, in the lay members, it is possible that they did receive the right teaching, but they misunderstood, or they did not retain the teaching that they did receive.

This sermon is not for the purpose of destroying what Mr. Armstrong taught us, because he was correct, but it is to refine our understanding and hopefully make it more specific on this very important subject.

Central to understanding this subject is the statement that Paul made there in Ephesians 2:10, where it states very poorly, "We are His workmanship." And then the second one, "Created in Christ Jesus unto good works." The sense of that verse is very clear. If we are created unto good works, then before God began His workmanship, we were not doing good works. Perhaps we were not capable of doing good works, that is, what God considers to be good works. Maybe, brethren, we have a wrong idea of even what good works are, or maybe our understanding of what good works are is incomplete. Maybe that needs to be clarified as well.

The first thing we are going to do here is to look at the "His workmanship" element here. Let us go back to the Old Testament to Psalm 100:1-3. Every time Psalm 100 comes into my mind, I remember when I was a boy in the Methodist Church. I had to learn this and recite it before the class in Sunday school.

Psalm 100:1-3 Make a joyful noise unto the LORD, all you lands.
Serve the LORD with gladness: come before his presence with singing. Know you that the LORD he is God: it is he that has made us, and not we ourselves: we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.

There are three commands in those first two verses that are given to every one of us. You are commanded to make a joyful noise unto the Lord. You are commanded to serve the Lord with gladness. You are commanded to come before His presence with singing. Then comes the cause for which

these ought to be done—the reason—and that is, *It is He that had made us*. That ought to motivate us. Now hold that thought and let us go back to the book of Job.

Job 14:14-15 If a man die, shall he live again? All the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come [speaking of being in the grave]. You shall call ["You shall resurrect me"] and I will answer you: you will have a desire to the work of your hands.

As we look here at the workmanship element of Ephesians 2:10, I think that these two verses will be sufficient to get across the principle that we are dealing with. It would be very easy for us to pass off what these verses say as pertaining only to the creating of man as a physical creature. *But* the New Testament puts a different spin on this, so that we can understand that God's creating did not end in the Garden of Eden. With that thought in mind (that God's creation did not end in the Garden of Eden), let us go to Galatians to a verse that we used several different times in that previous series.

Galatians 6:14 But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.

What Paul is saying is that he renounced the world's system. The world was crucified, the world's system was put to death as it were, in his mind. Now verse 15 is an explanation as *why* Paul had this frame of mind, this perspective on life. *For* is like a collective word. It is a preposition that is going to give you reason or cause for why Paul should say this.

Galatians 6:15 For [or "because"; "the reason is"] in Christ Jesus neither circumcision avails anything, nor uncircumcision. [Remember what I taught you there, that Paul is showing a contrast.] For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision avails anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation *is everything*.

There is the reason that Paul says the world is crucified, put to death. As far as he is concerned, it is almost like it does not exist, and he is not going to pay attention. It is not going to feed him. He is not going to let the world take

advantage of his desires. As far as he is concerned, it is not going to have any influence on him, because of the *new creation*.

Is that not a pretty strong implication that God's creative powers were not ended when Adam and Eve were created physically? Both Psalm 100 and Job 14 are referring, not to the physical creation—that is secondary; Psalm 100 is referring to the new creation. "You will have a desire to the work of Your hands." We are God's *spiritual* workmanship. We ought to be able to begin to understand the foundation that the creative acts of God are continuing in those that God has called and chosen, granted repentance to, and given His Spirit.

Ephesians 4:23-24 And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that you put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.

The important thing in this verse for this sermon is that it shows that God is the model that we are being formed after, and at the same time, it begins to show us what we will look like when His creative power is finished with us. The verse says that the new man is created *after God*.

Very frequently, whenever a sculptor is working, or an artist is working, do they not use a model? Is there not a pattern that they are following and putting on canvas or chipping out of a piece of marble or granite? In this case, God Himself is the model, and we are being created *after God*. It is He, as it were, that we are being shaped into, and therefore, even as it says in Genesis 1:26, "Let Us make man in Our image," where the primary reference is physically, so now we can also understand that we are being created in God's spiritual, moral, ethical attitude, perspective, and character image. He is the sculptor. He is the artist. He is the potter. We are the ones being shaped.

Knowing this begins to help us define what the Bible means by *good works*, and they are activities or conduct that are just like *God* would do. They are activities, conduct, and attitude that are in His image and are motivated and empowered by the same spirit or nature.

Who did the creating in Genesis 1? God did. How much help did He need from us to create us physically? In this case, absolutely none. God had the

materials He needed to work with, and in His own mind He carried the vision, the model. It was Himself, and the One that we now know as His Son, Jesus Christ. And so He knew then what He wanted the finished product to look like. Remember also at the creation of Adam and Eve, the conclusion, that is, Adam and Eve and the Garden of Eden, was a new creation arising out of destruction. Is that not right? Now with that thought in mind, go back to the Psalms again.

Psalm 104:30 You send forth Your Spirit, they are created: and You renew the face of the earth.

What this verse does is to state a general principle of creation, or we might say, of *re-creation*. God the Creator sends forth His Spirit in order to restore beauty to what has been defiled, or to create something entirely new. The thrust of our understanding must be that it is God, dressing and keeping His creation, who is the source, the driving force, to these awesome acts.

We are going to turn to Isaiah 32:15. We are breaking into a sentence here. You will find there is a semicolon at the end of verse 14, so a thought has been completed, but yet what follows is directly connected to it.

Isaiah 32:15 Until the spirit be poured upon us from on high, and the wilderness be a fruitful field, and the fruitful field be counted for a forest.

Now go back to verse 9 and we will pick up the sense of this context, because verse 9 begins a new paragraph and you will find that it is a warning to women in Judah, and we might include Israel, and at least in type it includes anybody at any time. He says:

Isaiah 32:9-10 Rise up, you women that are at ease [a particular group of women]; hear my voice, you careless daughters; give ear unto my speech. Many days and years shall you be troubled, you careless women.

The word *careless* also can mean complacent. Can we say *Laodicean*? Let us apply this to ourselves just in case, since we are living in a Laodicean time in

the history of the United States and in the church. It might be something that is directly aimed at us, and just because it says "women," you men, do not exclude yourselves from this because we might be able to interpret "women" to mean *churches, congregations, groups*.

Isaiah 32:10 Many days and years shall you be troubled, you careless women; for the vintage shall fail [meaning that there is coming a time of famine], the gathering shall not come.

There is not going to be much of a harvest going on, and we can begin to see the context very closely parallels the kind of thing that we are going through spiritually in the church of God, and so the warning there can very directly apply to us. He is warning of a terrible tribulation to come and that these conditions will remain until . . .

Isaiah 32:13-15 Upon the land of my people shall come up thorns and briers; yes, upon all the houses of joy in the joyous city: Because the palaces shall be forsaken: the multitude of the city shall be left: the forts and towers shall be for dens for ever, a joy of wild asses, a pasture of flocks; until the spirit be poured upon us from on high.

Remember the principle in Psalm 104:30: "God sends forth His Spirit, and they are created." Isaiah 32:15 is showing that this condition that he is prophesying of in which there is drought, there is famine, there is upset in the city. It is devastated, things are destroyed, perhaps people going into captivity, and it will stay in that state of destruction and tribulation *until* God does something. Is God ruling His creation or what? And then, when God sends forth His Spirit. . . .

Isaiah 32:16-18 Then judgment shall dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness remain in the fruitful field, and the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever. And my people shall dwell in a peaceable habitation, and in sure dwellings, and in quiet resting places.

God sends forth His Spirit to not merely restore, but to give great beauty and righteousness.

With that in mind, let us keep adding to this. Please remember as we go along here, that what we are building up to is Ephesians 2:8-10, that "We are *His* workmanship" and we will understand that God never stops creating, and that we are subject to His creative powers.

Ezekiel 39:29 Neither will I hide my face anymore from them; for I have poured out my spirit upon the house of Israel, says the Lord GOD.

Again, let us look at the context that leads to this statement about God sending forth His Spirit.

Ezekiel 39:21-26 And I will set my glory among the heathen, and all the heathen shall see my judgment that I have executed, and my hand that I have laid upon them [Israel]. So the house of Israel shall know that I am the LORD their God from that day and forward. And the heathen shall know that the house of Israel went into captivity for their iniquity: because they trespassed against me, therefore hid I my face from them, and gave them into the hand of their enemies: so fell they all by the sword. [Sounds very familiar. It sounds like a parallel to Isaiah 32, where we see a period of destruction.] According to their uncleanness and according to their transgressions have I done unto them, and hid my face from them. Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Now will I bring again the captivity of Jacob, and have mercy upon the whole house of Israel, and will be jealous for my holy name; after that they have borne their shame, and all their trespasses whereby they have trespassed against me, when they dwelt safely in their land, and none made them afraid.

This should be clearly understandable, that we sinned in the land, as it were, when we were going through good times. So God, in order to bring us around, began His creative effort by sending us off into captivity. Then (verse 28) when God begins to regather them:

Ezekiel 39:28-29 Then shall they know that I am the LORD their God, which caused them to be led into captivity among the heathen: but I have gathered them unto their own land, and have left none of them any more there. [He gathered them all] Neither will I hide my face any more from them; for I have poured out my spirit upon the house of Israel, saith the Lord GOD.

Again we see that not only does a physical re-gathering take place when God sends forth His Spirit upon Israel, but spiritual re-creation also occurs when God sends forth His Spirit, because then *they shall know Him*. The implication of that statement is that before they went into captivity they did not know Him, but when they came out of captivity, now they knew Him, and you see, spiritual re-creation has begun. Let us go back to Ezekiel 36 and this series of scriptures is like a bridge, very important to understanding works and their relationship to salvation.

Ezekiel 36:22-27 Therefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus says the LORD GOD; I do not this for your sakes, O house of Israel, but for my holy name's sake, which you have profaned among the heathen, whither you went. And I will sanctify my great name, which was profaned among the heathen, which you have profaned in the midst of them; and the heathen shall know that I am the LORD, says the Lord GOD, when I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes. For [Here comes that word again, that collective preposition which is going to show you cause] I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land. Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean: [Notice what God does.] from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh. [How much work has man done?] And I will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you [now notice this next phrase], and cause you to walk in my statutes, and you shall keep my judgments, and do them. ["because I caused you to do it!"]

Is that clear or what, brethren? "I will cause you." If you look in modern translations they will say, "*I will **make** you do it,*" or "*I will **move** you to do it*"—"to walk in My statutes, and you shall keep My judgments, and do them."

This only happens only because of what God does, and all of this is seen within the context of God delivering His people. Therefore *good works*—what pleases God—are the effects of God sending forth His Spirit and delivering. Works are not the cause of deliverance. Thus salvation, which more literally means *deliverance from*, is seen in the Bible both as something already secured (perfect tense, in Ephesians 2:8), as well as something in progress, and therefore not yet completed.

Let us go back to the New Testament to Romans 4:16-24. Once you have this concept in mind, you begin to understand why Paul wrote what he did. He was drawing, as it were, this concept of grace and salvation and works out of the Old Testament and combining it together with the teaching of Jesus Christ, and what we get out of it is the New Testament.

Romans 4:16 Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end [the goal, the purpose] the promise might be sure to all the seed.

Can you imagine if it depended on us? Nobody would be saved! Look at that wording: "To the end that it might be *sure*."

Romans 4:16-17 To the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham: who is the father of us all. (As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations,) [this is important] Before him whom he believed, even God, who quickens the dead, and calls those things which be not as though they were.

Our salvation is not completed, and yet because of God, and what He is, it is as good as done. But do not quote me it cannot be aborted, because it can. But it will not be aborted because God is weak.

Romans 4:18-24 Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, so shall thy seed be. And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb: He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief [speaking of Abraham]; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and being fully persuaded that, what he had promised [what God had promised], he was able also to perform. And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness. Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; but for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead.

Notice again that in verse 17 it says "God, who quickens the dead, and calls those things which be not as though they were." Combine that with verse 21, "Being fully persuaded that what He had promised, He was able also to perform." In other words, God, the Deliverer, has the vision of where He is leading us and taking us, combined with the power and the wisdom to be able to accomplish it even if He has to quicken us—that is, resurrect us, make us alive—in order to do it. Is anything too hard for the Lord? Paul, who wrote Romans, also wrote Philippians 1:6 where he said, "Being confident of this very thing, that He which has begun a good work in you [this new creation] **will** perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." He will finish it because He is faithful. Abraham believed that, and so he staggered not at the promise of God.

Just think about this. I would have to say that Abraham, by the time God gave him these promises, was a man of a great deal of spiritual perception, and if he understood what God was saying to him and promising to him, he must have shaken his head almost in unbelief that such an awesome thing could be done.

But here was a man who was childless, and God was going to make his progeny, his seed, like the stars of heaven and like the sands of the seashore, and he did not even have one kid yet that could be counted as being part of

the promise. But it says "Abraham staggered not," because he must have known God awfully well, and *knew* that He had the power to bring it to pass, and he saw God's promise as being secure.

So faith, a living faith that produces works, because of what God is and what He has already done, is the secondary part of the deliverance that we call salvation. But I want to emphasize in this sermon that it is what God is and what God does that is the active and dynamic force in salvation, so that we can have some of this burden of potential failure and guilt lifted from our shoulders. Because unless some of that is lifted from us, we can never be free to live the abundant life that Jesus Christ said He came to give us.

Let us go back to the book of Deuteronomy to lay another layer of foundation here. What we are going to do here is show the basis of Israel's relationship with God. We already have one piece which was given in God's conversation with Abraham. Now here we are, picking it up, let us say, some four or five hundred years later when the book of Deuteronomy was written, and through Moses He said:

Deuteronomy 7:6-9 For you [Israel] are a holy people [set apart] unto the LORD your God: the LORD your God has chosen you [Notice it is what God did.] to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth. The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you because you were more in number than any people; for you were the fewest of all people: But because the LORD loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, has the LORD brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Know therefore that the LORD your God, he is God, the faithful God, which keeps covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations.

Notice, it was what God envisioned, He chose to do, and then followed through with doing, because He is faithful to what He is, and to His promises. It had nothing at all to do with what the people would ordinarily think of as being their strength or goodness that might recommend them to God as being worthy of His attention. And so we see in the choosing of

Israel that they were His workmanship. They were *His* creation. Abraham had been dead for a long time by the time this came to pass.

Let us go back to the New Testament and we will tie this in to you and me. In Romans 9:8-16, we will again see that Paul builds a spiritual concept upon what is in the Old Testament where the foundation was laid in giving us types.

Romans 9:8-9 That is, They which are the children of the flesh [natural descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob], these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed. [Abraham's real seed are those who have come by the way of the promise of God.] For this is the word of promise, At this time will I come, and Sarah shall have a son.

That son of course was Isaac. When the promise was given to Abraham, Isaac had not even been born. Abraham did not have a son by his wife—she could not conceive—and so a miracle had to be done to Sarah in order for her to produce the promised seed, or a type of the promised Seed.

Romans 9:10-16 And not only this; but when Rebecca [Isaac's wife] also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac [another generation later]; (For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, ["I did not choose you, Israel, because you were more in number, or any qualities that might physically recommend you to Me."] that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calls;) It was said unto her, The elder [Esau] shall serve the younger [Jacob], As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated. [Now a conclusion:] What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid. [Was God unfair in what He did?] For he said to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So [conclusion] then it is not of him that wills, nor of him that runs, but of God that shows mercy.

Paul then, finding truth—evidence—in the Old Testament, applies that basic principle here to the spiritual creation that is going on, only here he calls it

election. God *elected* Israel out of all the nations, and God has *elected* human beings—people—to be His children. It is God electing who will be part of spiritual Israel, not according to any work or particular value on our part, but because He has willed it so. And so the illustrations are then that He chose Isaac over Ishmael before Isaac was born, and He chose Jacob over Esau before either one of them was born, or either one of them had done anything; and therefore *we* are revealed as children of Abraham, that is, children of promise on the basis of God's election, or choice, not because of any value or particular worth of what we have done. None of our works recommended us to Him, but because of what God has determined to execute.

So what did He do? He sent forth His Spirit, and *you* were elected to be part of His new creation. Now let me tell you something: It has been that way with every single human being who has to this point been elected to be a son of God.

Let us go back to Genesis 6. Are we His workmanship, or what, brethren? Genesis 6 contains the preamble to the Flood:

Genesis 6:8-9 But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD. These are the generations of Noah: Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God.

I wonder if you ever noticed this. Noah is not pronounced to be a just man, perfect in his generations and that he walked with God, *until* after God describes the wickedness of the times leading up to the Flood, and that Noah found **grace** in the eyes of the Lord *before* he ever was pronounced a just man.

A conclusion is inescapable: In order to be consistent with the rest of the Bible, Noah was not chosen by God because he was a righteous man, because he was not. He too was blindly involved in the pre-Flood wickedness. To what degree, I have no idea, and until God opened his eyes, until God took action, until God sent forth His Spirit, *then* Noah responded, and the rest, they say, is history.

Now what about Abraham?

Genesis 12:1 NOW the LORD had said unto Abram, Get you out of your country, and from your kindred, and from your father's house, unto a land that I will show you.

The story of Abraham begins rather abruptly. Just a few verses before this in chapter 11 it begins with his genealogy, and then it quickly moves on to show some of the significant spiritual events in his life. But now let us go back to very familiar verses in I Corinthians 1, beginning in verse 26, where it says:

I Corinthians 1:26-29 For you see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God has chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, has God chosen, yes, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: [And then verse 29 is very significant.] That no flesh should glory in his presence.

And that includes Abraham. Abraham was no more righteous than Noah, or you and me. **Nobody** can say, "God, I am not all Your workmanship. I had all these good works before You ever called me." Abraham was elected because of what God chose to execute, not because or on the basis of anything Abraham had done. And so we find in verse 30, "But. . ." Here comes the contrast:

I Corinthians 1:30-31 But of him are you in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: That, according as it is written, He that glories, let him glory in the Lord.

Because we are His workmanship. What do you have (meaning spiritually) that you did not receive? Nothing! Zilch! Because before we were ever called, and before God sent forth His Spirit, there was nothing that was in the image of God, except that we were physically in His image. Think about it.

Now let us put a little bit of a lid here. Go back to Ephesians 1. As we are reading this, I want you to remember Ephesians 1 is the preamble to what comes later. It is Paul's introduction to these awesome concepts that he was going to get across to us—awesome spiritual concepts—one of which is that *we are saved by grace through faith*, and that *we are God's workmanship*. I might add here that I heard Mr. Armstrong say on a radio broadcast that he felt that this was his favorite chapter in the whole Bible.

Ephesians 1:3-4 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as He has chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:

I want you to see what the emphasis is as Paul writes this. It is *God* who has blessed us with *all spiritual blessings*.

Ephesians 1:5-12 Having predestinated us [God did that] unto the adoption of children [God did that] by [through] Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He has made us accepted in the beloved. In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace; wherein He has abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; having made known unto us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He has purposed in Himself: That in the dispensation of the fullness of times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in Him: In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of Him who works all things after the counsel of His own will: That we should be to the praise of His glory, who first trusted in Christ.

Did you notice how many times Paul names *what God has done* in order for us to be in this peculiar position? The concept of creating a body of people that we now know of as *the sons of God—the church*—was conceived in His mind before the foundation of the world. He willed it, He shed its elements. He determined it was a purpose to be accomplished according to a plan that

was to be executed by and through Jesus Christ in order that all involved would, when the plan was completed, be united in one, the one body that we know of as the church in this chapter, and then in Ephesians 3 is further revealed as being *the Family of God*.

So the thrust of what Paul has written is that we are caught up and being carried toward the completion of a purpose that we did not conceive of, neither now nor forever made absolutely no provision for being drawn into so that it can be completed in us, and that we have no power to bring it to pass. We are **His** workmanship. Let us get things in the right order.

I am going to show you a fantastic verse that John (Reid) mentioned in his sermon last week in Hebrews 6. When things are not translated quite right we are denied a more correct understanding. John even mentioned this in his sermon. I was glad he said it, and I will repeat it, and maybe now it will have a little bit more meaning for you.

Hebrews 6:1 Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God.

The phrase that I am looking at here for the purpose of this sermon is *Let us go on unto perfection*, because what that verse literally says in the Greek is, "Let us be carried forward." The metaphor is drawn from the picture of a *tidal wave of power*, sweeping us toward the completion of this process. And that tidal wave of power is God Himself, the Creator, moving us toward perfection.

Brethren, what can we do in a situation like that, to bring forth good works? All we can do is try to respond, to go with the flow, to not fight against, but to yield to that awesome power that is carrying us toward His Kingdom. "He sends forth His Spirit and they are created."

Now go back to Hebrews 13. John also mentioned this one, and because he did, I thought that I would put it in my sermon to emphasize it a little bit more and maybe it will mean more to us. In verse 20, as Paul concludes this message:

Hebrews 13:20-21 Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect.

Let me just take out the other material in between: "Now let the God of peace . . . **make you perfect.**"

That has more meaning that way, does it not? I think, brethren, that we need to rethink our concepts of this thing that we call salvation. To work upwards towards salvation is, in the strictest sense of the biblical word, *preposterous!* It is inverting the order of things. It is like learning Z Y X before we learn A B C. We work downwards from salvation, because we *have* it, not in order to *get* it. Now whatever *good works* may mean, they are the *consequences of*, not the *cause of*, salvation. Good works are the *purpose* of salvation. "We are His workmanship, created *unto* salvation." So good works are the purpose of salvation. It is what we are being created *for*, says Paul. Therefore, salvation, brethren, is *divine* creation. Maybe this verse that I am going to read to you out of Psalm 74 will have a great deal more meaning to you

Psalm 74:12 For God is my King of old, working salvation in the midst of the earth.

He is working salvation. It is a process, a creative process that is going on. Does this make more understandable what Jesus said in John 5:17 that just came to mind, that He responded to criticism about His use of the Sabbath day when He healed a person? He told those critics of His, "My Father works hitherto [implying that He is still working], and *I* work." God is working salvation. God is a creator.

Let us go back to the New Testament again, and it looks as though we are going to have to conclude this sermon today with this verse, but God willing, I will try to get back to it again the next time, because I am far from finished with it, because I want you to see it so very clearly. In Philippians 2:12-15, we refer to them so often, but again now maybe they will have some more meaning to you.

Philippians 2:12-13 Wherefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which works in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.

Verse 13 is intended by Paul to be a note of encouragement because it shows us that salvation is not so much our work as it is God's, and therefore the inference is that it has every chance for success because it is God who is working in us. He is working in us "Both to will [meaning to have the desire] and to do [to actually accomplish]."

So God gives us the desire, and then God gives us the power. What do we have that we have not received to do it? So He not only calls—this is important—He works on us and in us to the end. In other words, His creative efforts do not stop simply because we were elected by Him to be a part of this. His creative process, the sending forth of His Spirit to be created, continues right all the way to the end, giving us the desire and giving us the power to enable us to do.

Now let us go back to verse 12, because there is a bit of an understanding of this word "*Work* out your own salvation." *Work out* to you and me means something somewhat different from what Paul intended when he wrote it, because the word is more closely related to our English *workexpress*, or *manifest* that which you possess. Now let me put that more literal translation into that verse:

"Wherefore my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, manifest [or express] your salvation with fear and trembling."

When you see that put in there, you see what Paul was saying is that salvation is something that we already possess, because salvation is God's creative energy being expended on you and me. Its success does not depend so much on you and me; it depends on the power of God's Spirit working within us, giving us the will, the desire to do and giving us the power to do.

So Paul is appealing to them, "Let it work in you. **Express** it. **Manifest** it so that a witness is made."

I gave you a little clue there of what works are for, not to save us, but a part of it is to witness the fact that God is working in us.

Why does Paul show that working out our salvation is a matter of fear and trembling? The answer is given right in the book of Philippians. The reason is because we do not know all that might be required of us in doing God's will. Paul mentions a number of things, examples, or gives us a possibility of what might face us.

Philippians 1:30 Having the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear to be in me.

The Philippians were already being required to offer themselves in conflict to the world. Persecution was coming down on them. In Philippians 2:8, this way of life cost Jesus Christ His life. That is quite a sacrifice, and I do not think that we just normally want to give up our life. Also in chapter 2, for Paul it required imprisonment. I do not think very many of us would like that. For Timothy, costly sacrificial service in service to the church (Philippians 2:19-22). How about for Epaphroditus? Physical illness, which is implied came upon him because he spent himself for the church for God's creative efforts (Philippians 2:25-30).

Now since God, by His workmanship, is producing the willing and the doing of His good and perfect will, there is then therefore no basis, no legitimate reason, for murmuring and disputing. "Do all things without murmurings and disputings" (Philippians 2:14).

Not only are we forbidden to complain about the difficulties in persecution that will befall us in carrying out God's good pleasure, but quarreling among ourselves is prohibited. "That you may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom you shine [there is the witness] as lights in the world" (Philippians 2:15).

If we will obey God's instruction to verse 14, we will become blameless—no finger of accusation can be justly pointed at us—and harmless, meaning morally pure, and in this way we can live without rebuke, without incurring spiritual damage. Therefore we can be a proper witness for God in the world.

Everywhere we look in God's Word, we see this enormously important principle set forth, that what we do in terms of good works is always an effect of what God does. But it is not that we are seen as puppets on strings, because God somehow, miraculously—I do not know how He does it, but He does it in such a way as to voluntarily make us make the right choices—*eventually*. Sometimes I am sure that we even strain His creative powers, His patience, to finally bring us to the place where we say to God, "Amen. I'm going to do it Your way." He probably says "Hallelujah! What took you so long?" But I am certainly in that condition myself, and I am sure that I have strained His patience an awful lot of times.

I think that this sermon will provide a good foundation for this series. Please remember *we are **His** workmanship*. We respond. He pushes the clay around. **He** is the potter; we yield. That is what *good works* are—yielding to do God's will, and it must be done by His Spirit. Doing it humanly—according to the human spirit—is not good enough for the Kingdom of God.