

“His Workmanship”

**Sermon preached by Pat Youter
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Texts: Ephesians 2:8-10**

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (Ephesians 2:8-10, NIV)

Please pray with me.

This month we’ve focused on four ways that we belong to God.

- We are His sheep.
- We are His children.
- We are His redeemed.
- Today we’ll look at being His workmanship.

I have a confession to make: I’m English major and, because of that, I think it’s helpful to understand the context in which something is written. So we’re going to take a moment to look at the context for our text today. Paul wrote this letter. This would be the same Paul who earlier in his life had persecuted the church, hounding Christians for their faith. This would be the same Paul who was zealous for God and for the Jewish faith. This would be the same Paul who met the Lord Jesus Christ in a blinding flash of light on the road to Damascus. One minute he’s riding along, carrying letters that would allow him to round up more Christians, and the next minute he’s lying in the dust, having a conversation with someone none of his companions could see. (See Acts 9) This is that Paul.

He’s now writing Ephesians. He himself is in prison as he writes, persecuted for **his** faith. He has gone from persecutor to persecute. He has gone from being zealous for God and the Jewish faith to being zealous for God and the Christian faith. He’s gone from being blinded by the light to seeing the light so very clearly that he articulates it forcefully in these verses we’re examining today. So let’s look at what Paul says:

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (Ephesians 2:8-10)

Before we can really talk about being His workmanship, we’re going to talk about the three concepts of verses 8-9. They are the foundation for understanding our relationship to God because we are His workmanship. Those concepts are:

- We are saved by grace,
- We are saved through faith,

- We are saved as a gift.

Let's talk about them in that order.

Paul says, first of all, that we are saved by grace. But what does that mean? How do we finite creatures understand the grace of the eternal God?

Grace here is God's unmerited and undeserved favor, His loving kindness. We talk about grace and we think about grace and we even sing about grace. But how do we understand and experience grace?

It's easier for me to understand an abstract idea if I think about it in terms of a concrete example. So let me give you an example. This example has helped me to understand grace a little better.

When my parents married, my grandparents raised the roof on their house to create a little upstairs apartment for them. Four whole rooms up a really steep staircase. My grandmother described what it felt like the day they first cut into the roof of their house; she said her heart was in her throat.

Under that roof and from my grandparents, I learned about grace. Both my grandparents worked full-time jobs all through the week—Grandpa as an accountant for the Rock Island Line and Grandma as a grocery store cashier. Saturday was the one day of the week they did not have to be up and out early.

But on Saturday mornings, I would creep out of my bed, creep down those very steep stairs, and creep into my grandparents' room to wake them up. I adored my grandparents and wanted as much time with them as I could have. They would get up and have breakfast with me.

My parents decided to put an end to this practice. They put a lock on the door up as high as they could. It didn't matter. Every Saturday I went back and forth, silently pulling a chair up to the door, undoing the latch, and heading down the stairs. When my younger brother was old enough to go along, I'd wake him and take him along with me.

Not once did my grandparents ever make me feel like it was not okay to keep this Saturday morning tradition. Not once. Not ever.

That is a demonstration of grace. I didn't have to do anything to earn my grandparents' favor or love. By the very fact of my existence, I had their love. You who are grandparents understand this.

Now take this example of an experience of grace, of unmerited favor and place it in the context of our Christian experience. Our salvation, our faith, our new life are all a result of God's gracious gift to us. It is all about grace—all! The whole thing is a gift from God.

The second concept we're talking about from Ephesians 2:8-9 is saved through faith. What does faith mean? Faith is trust in, dependence on, and submission to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now the example, the story to illustrate this concept: When I was nine years old, my family moved from the apartment in my grandparents' home. We moved into a brand-spanking-new, two-bedroom, one-bath ranch on a long straight street of very similar-looking houses.

But the family continued to grow and we were finally a four-child family with two bedrooms and one bath. My parents decided something had to give, and it was the attic. We added two bedrooms and a bath in the attic. I say we because it was “we,” because it was a family project. My dad, who had construction experience, did the lion’s share of the work, of course. But the rest of us pitched in where we could. I remember doing things like putting in insulation—the pink fiberglass stuff that stuck in your skin and made you itch. Or putting down the underlayment for the flooring. Or helping to put up the paneling and then countersinking and filling the nail holes.

I enjoyed the project because I was learning new skills, I was spending time with my dad, and I knew I’d get a new bedroom when we finished. And I knew we would finish. We had complete confidence that my dad’s plan would work. We had faith. Spiritually speaking, we can have complete confidence that our heavenly Father’s plan will work.

The third concept we have to talk about is “saved as a gift.” Most of us have experience with gifts but here’s an illustration:

I found some great wallpaper—and it was on sale—and there was enough to re-paper the kitchen. So we bought it. As we prepared to hang the wallpaper, it occurred to me that this would be the right time to open up the closet we’d closed off in the guest bath. We could now use this space in the kitchen for the microwave.

I approached this with a phrase my long-suffering husband has come to dread, “You know, I’ve been thinking . . .” But he agreed this would be the time for that project, too. While he was working on tearing out the plaster, I suggested again, “You know, I’ve been thinking . . . that this would be the logical time to tile the kitchen floor.” We selected tile.

Then as he prepared to hang the wallpaper at long last, I had one more bright idea—“You know, I’ve been thinking that the kitchen is very dark. Wouldn’t it be terrific to have a skylight?” He cut a hole in the roof to install a skylight. I think that like my grandmother, his heart was in his throat. At long last he got to putting up the wallpaper, only to discover that there wasn’t enough. And all of that was one kitchen remodeling ago. We’ve completely redone it since then. This man is a gift to me!

Going back to the spiritual concept, we are saved as a gift of God, not because of works. It is not a result of anything that we do— or don’t do. It is not because we have worked at it. Therefore, we cannot boast about it. We **cannot**.

Okay, we have the three foundational concepts—we are saved by grace, saved through faith, saved as a gift. So let’s move on to the logical consequence of those truths: For we are God’s workmanship, His creation, His masterpiece, His work of art. The word for workmanship is the word from which we get the word “poem.”

This summer we experienced “workmanship” at our house. We had a builder add an addition to our house. I discovered things I didn’t know about workmanship. Did you know that this kind of workmanship requires really cool, really loud tools? Did you know they can shoot pea gravel through the air to exactly where it’s intended to go? Did you know that a 30-foot, orange dumpster and a bright blue porta-potty can be standout lawn ornaments in the front yard? Literally standouts.

C. S. Lewis uses a construction analogy, too, in *Mere Christianity*: “Imagine yourself as a living house. God comes in to rebuild that house. At first, perhaps, you can understand what He is doing. He is getting the drains right and stopping the leaks in the roof and so on: you knew that those jobs needed doing and so you are not surprised. But presently he starts knocking the house about in a way that hurts abominably and does not seem to make sense. What on earth is He up to? The explanation is that He is building quite a different house from the one you thought of—throwing out a new wing here, putting on an extra floor there, running up towers, making courtyards. You thought you were going to be made into a decent little cottage, but He is building a palace. He intends to come and live in it Himself.”

We are God’s workmanship. **We** are God’s workmanship. Though this “we” is plural, I think that we can think about this concept in the singular and the plural senses. You are God’s workmanship. I am God’s workmanship. We, together, all of us, are God’s workmanship, His masterpiece, His work of art. He works in us individually to build up His church. He works corporately in us as the church to bring honor and glory to Himself.

Ephesians 2:10 also says that God created us in Christ Jesus. We are created for a purpose. Created for what? For good works—and not good works that we come up with on our own. Good works that God prepared in advance for us to do, or as some translations say, works that He prepared for us to “walk in.”

It’s exciting then to consider the possibilities. What good works does He have in mind for each of us? What good works does He have for us as a congregation, as His Body here at Kirkmont Presbyterian Church?

We are God’s workmanship.

A moment ago I asked you to consider what good works the Lord has in mind for each of us and what good works He has for Kirkmont. Today is Celebration Sunday, and we are about to dedicate our financial pledges. They will be some of the building blocks for the coming year’s budget. What we give financially is one of the good works that God has prepared in advance for us to do, for He does intend for His people to give. He always has; He always will.

In this and in every good work He prepared for us to do, we show forth what God can do in and through His people. The world catches a vision for what the Lord is creating through how He is constructing His church.

Therefore, remember this, people of God: For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (Ephesians 2:8-10)

Amen.