



CANYON HILLS

COMMUNITY CHURCH

Series: Ephesians

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God's Masterpiece

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I hope you will rearrange your schedules for this Friday night as we have one of our Night of Worship events. It's also going to be recorded. It's just an amazing story that somebody attended one of them, they found out how much God loved them, and they surrendered their heart to Jesus. You never know what God is going to do. She ended up being on the worship team after that, so you never know what he's going to do with you when you come. You may be singing up here the next week. We'll see. I hope you'll do everything you can to make Friday night a priority.

Let's get our Bibles open now to Ephesians 2. In the context of the entire universe, there has never been much scientific debate over the fact that the greatest complexity in all of nature is, by far, the human being. Scientists have long agreed that nothing surpasses the amazement of human DNA.

Even the atheist scientist unknowingly agrees with Scripture that we are fearfully and wonderfully made. Yet what if I were to say to you that there's one creation that absolutely surpasses human beings? What if I were to tell you that there's one thing in the universe that's even greater than the creation of man and woman?

You see, for the last 10 Sundays, we've been studying the book of Ephesians together, verse by verse, and we're making our way, slowly but surely, through the entire book. Paul has been teaching us all along that it's not the creation of human beings that is God's greatest work. He's been telling us it's the re-creation of fallen human beings that is God's greatest work.

In fact, we're going to see today that it is the Christian who is God's masterpiece. Believers who put all their faith and trust in Jesus Christ are, by far, the greatest miracle on the face of the earth. Let's stand for the reading of God's Word. We're going to start in verse 8. We covered verses 8 and 9 last Sunday, but we're going to start there and get to the verse we will talk about today.

"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship,

created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."

Father in heaven, I pray with all my heart today that once again, we would be inspired and our faith would be renewed in the overwhelming, wonderful truth that it's by your grace that we are forgiven and saved. It is by your gift that we can know you and love you forever, God. Yet, God, today I also pray that you would help us to understand what that means.

Help us, God, to grasp and embrace what you intend for that to result in and produce in our lives. God, we just give you our hearts now. We pray you would remove all the distractions from our minds and teach us and grow us in Christ. Amen.

Before we dive in, I think we need to recognize what some people call or believe is an apparent conflict, or maybe even a contradiction, with which Paul has just presented us. In verses 8 and 9, Paul insists that salvation is by the grace of God alone through our faith in Jesus alone. He has been insisting on that.

In verse 9, he mentions the topic of good works, and when he talks about our works, it's in the negative. It's not positive. He tells us in no uncertain terms that we are not saved by our works or our efforts at self-righteousness. We are not forgiven or going to heaven based on anything that is good in us or anything we have done that might be good. Nothing!

It was all of God's work of grace in us so that we have no reason to boast and no ground for feeling some sense of prideful accomplishment. That is very clear. Ephesians 2:8-9 is really strong and consistent Christian gospel language. It's the pinnacle of the gospel, the good news in which we celebrate.

Yet then you come to verse 10, and Paul brings up the topic of works again. He says, this time, that God has created us to do good works which he has prepared in advance for us to do. It's at this precise point that Protestant and Catholic theology part ways. You see, many Roman Catholics will insist with us that salvation is by grace through faith. We have 100 percent agreement between Protestants and Catholics.

Yet the Roman Catholics answer the question about the relationship between faith and our works much differently than we Protestants do. For instance, Catholics teach that when it comes to our salvation, God has done his part. He does his part by providing forgiveness through the substitutionary death of his Son, Jesus Christ, on our behalf.

The Catholic Church also teaches that we must do our part by doing good deeds so God will save us. So, if you were to look at Catholic theology in the form of a mathematical equation, it would look like this: our faith, plus our good works, equals our salvation. Does that make sense? That's the Catholic doctrine of salvation. It's our faith in the grace of God, plus what we do, that moves God to save us.

Protestant theology, on the other hand, looks similar, but is massively different. Protestant theology looks like this: our faith in the grace of God equals our salvation plus good works. The side of the equal sign that that little term, *good works*, is on makes all the difference in the world and is what separates Christianity from all other world religions, including Roman Catholicism. Ephesians 2:10 makes it perfectly clear. The main idea of verse 10 is that *our good works do not secure our salvation, but instead are the fruit or result of it.*

1. *We are God's masterpiece.* We are God's *handiwork*, some of your Bibles say in verse 10, or God's *workmanship*. We are his. We are his possession. We are a workmanship, a *handiwork*, or a masterpiece that belongs completely to his work. The key phrase there is, "**...created in Christ Jesus...**" We are his masterpiece that he has created in Christ Jesus.

Paul here is describing God's greatest work of transforming us who were once spiritually and morally dead into newly re-created men and women. We are his masterpiece that he has created in Christ Jesus. He has made us alive with the resurrection power of Jesus now in us. That's what makes us his masterpiece. He has recreated us in Jesus.

A. *God gave us a new set of eyes.* Now, when you think about it, in these masterpieces we call Christians, believers in Jesus, as God has created us, he has given us a new set of eyes, hasn't he? The masterpiece God has created in Christ has new vision. Before our re-creation, we could only see with our physical eyes, but we were spiritually blind.

Now we see with spiritual eyes, and everything seems new. There's a deeper beauty that goes beyond the surface beauty of a person or of anything in creation. We see with awe and wonder the power of God to create, heal, make whole, and change, and we see sin for the evil that it truly is. Everything we see now is with the eyes of God.

B. *God gave us a new set of ears.* Before we were re-created, we were spiritually deaf. The Bible made no sense to us, or if it did, we resented, rejected, or resisted it at best. Now we hear the teaching of Jesus and the teachings of Scripture and we respond to it with joy and with faith.

C. *God gave us a new mind.* Scripture is clear that before we were re-created, our minds were darkened. We called the good things bad, and we called the bad things good. The things of God seemed foolish to us before we were recreated. We were confused when the supposed good things turned bad and left us feeling miserable, deceived, and empty.

Now, with new minds, we think differently. We value things differently. We understand the futility, pettiness, and temporary nature of worldly values and worldly pleasures. Now, with our new minds, we know beyond a shadow of a doubt that this life isn't all there is. This world isn't all there is. It's only possible through the masterpieces of God who have been given new minds.

D. *God gave us a new heart.* Before our hearts were hard, we hated God, and if we didn't hate him, we at least ignored him or mocked him. We didn't care much for others, especially those who loved God and called themselves Christians. Now, our hearts are softened and we find ourselves loving God.

Even more miraculous, we find ourselves loving God's people. We find ourselves absolutely changed in our hearts toward what God desires, even more so than what we desire. All of this has happened because God has brought to life something that was lifeless in us. We are his masterpiece, recreated in Jesus.

E. God will give us a new body. Getting ready for this weekend, I was reminded all too well that Scripture also promises that as a part of God's masterpieces he is creating in us, he promises us that when we are resurrected from the dead to live into eternal life with him, he will give us a new body. Praise God!

I woke up this Friday. Tammi was out of town and I was in the car, and I decided to give her a call and see how she was doing. She said, "How are you doing?" and I said, "Horrible." Don't you wives love that response from your husbands when you ask them how they're doing? I said, "I can't believe how many things in my body hurt right now." I could hear her snickering on the other end of the line. I said, "I woke up today and my neck is killing me."

Not only that, but my tooth was throbbing. I had a root canal and a crown or something on Wednesday, and I woke up Friday morning and my mouth was just throbbing. Then, my lower back was really sore. I was in the car and I was like, "Oh my word!" Not only that, but my wrist is killing me. I played too much tennis last Tuesday night and I tweaked it and it was just kind of hurting. It hurt to even turn the steering wheel.

I'm still not done yet. Then, my arch on my right foot just feels like someone just put a nail right through the bottom of my foot. I was like, "What else is left? What else could be hurting?" I was just remembering, as I'm thinking about the masterpieces into which God is making us, I long for that part of the journey, to be made with a new body. Can anyone agree with me on that? Am I the only one who feels that way? But you know, after a half a bottle of ibuprofen, I feel great! My liver is all shriveled up, but I don't feel any of that stuff anymore. Praise God for ibuprofen!

For the last 33 verses, up until this point of Ephesians, like an artist, Paul has been describing the Master's brushstrokes of his re-creation in theological terms. Just by way of recalling, he has told us that God has chosen us before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him, predestined us for adoption as his children, redeeming us through the forgiveness of our sins, sealing us with the promised Holy Spirit, guaranteeing our eternal inheritance to come, making us alive with Jesus, and sitting us down with Jesus at the right hand of the throne. All of that is theological talk for the masterpieces that his children are. Then, we are also told...

2. He does this by his grace and mercy. He has accomplished all that according to the riches of his grace and mercy, according to his great love for the praise of his glory so that no one could ever boast and brag. That is the theology of the masterpieces of God. We are his masterpiece, indeed. That's the understatement of the universe.

All of these spiritual blessings are the brushstrokes of God, but the paint God is using to make these masterpieces called Christians is nothing less than the shed blood of his Son, Jesus. Our re-

creation in Jesus only happens when his sinless shed blood is applied to our sinful and spiritually lifeless hearts, paying for and removing all of our sin.

Then, Jesus' righteousness is applied to our forgiven hearts, making us alive and new. This all happens when we repent of our sin and put all of our faith in Jesus to save us. At that point, spontaneously and instantly, we are created and born again into the masterpiece of God. He has truly made us pleasing to him.

Paul has been telling us up until verse 10 that we needed to have a new start as a result of the life of Jesus in us. Now, we come to verse 10. Paul tells us that God has done all that so that we will do the good works he has prepared for us to do. What I see here is that as the masterpieces of God's work, he doesn't just store us away in some closet until the day he takes us to heaven.

God doesn't create you as his masterpiece and then kind of lock you away in a locker somewhere so you don't get damaged, and then when it's your day, he just brings you up to heaven. No, not at all. In verse 10, we see that we are God's works in progress. To help us understand that, Paul unpacks that a little bit more in other places where he has written in the Bible.

One of those is in Philippians 1, so turn there and look at verse 6, again, supporting this idea that although we are God's masterpieces, he is not finished with us yet. In Philippians 1:6, Paul writes, **"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."** He's not done yet, but he's still working on his masterpieces.

For a little bit more, turn to 2 Thessalonians 1:11. **"To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling..."** Worthy of the masterpiece into which he has made you. **"...and may fulfill every resolve [in you] for good and every work of faith by his power..."** So, you see there that Paul is writing that we have been made worthy because God has called us to himself. Now, Paul prays that the resolve in us, the desire in us to do good works, would be fulfilled now that we are God's.

One more. Just turn to Titus 2:11. Here is where Paul is most graphic. **"For the grace of God has appeared..."** Again, the grace of God is where this all begins. It's where the masterpieces of God start. It's with his grace. **"...bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age..."** That is miraculous enough in and of itself.

"...waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ..." He's coming again. **"...who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness [sin] and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works."** There it is.

It starts out with God's grace, which brings us salvation through Jesus, who gave himself to redeem us from our sin (verse 14), to purify for himself... He has made us holy and blameless. We couldn't do it ourselves. We have become his own possession, and now we are involved in

the beautiful good works God has for us to do. God's incredible grace to save us now drives us who are saved to do good works for his glory.

Paul is saying over and over that a salvation divorced from good works isn't a valid salvation. That's what he's saying here. To put it in other terms, he's saying a faith that isn't changing you can't save you. Protestant teaching clearly shows that even though good works have nothing to do with how we were saved in the first place, genuine faith in the life, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus produces or results in us doing good works for God.

Just so you know, this isn't just Paul's hobby horse. James, another author in the New Testament, wrote this in James 2: **"What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him...? So also faith by itself, if it does not have [good] works, is dead... Show me your faith apart from your works..."** That's a rhetorical request. James is saying, "Show me your faith without good works! You can't do it! How are you supposed to prove you believe?"

Then, he says, **"I will show you my faith by my works...faith apart from works is dead."** James is saying our works are not the grounds or the means of our salvation but the evidence or consequence of it. Our words don't prove our faith; our works do. Our new way of life does. That's what is the proof that we are the masterpieces of God.

Notice back in Ephesians 2, after verse 10, Paul doesn't launch into a to-do list of good works right here. No, in chapters 4-6, Paul will highlight some of the most beautiful good works that are common for all Christians. He just doesn't do it here. He's still talking theology. He's still talking doctrine for the first three chapters of Ephesians.

Yet in chapters 4-6, Paul is going to highlight some of the good works that are common for all of God's masterpieces. In chapter 4, he's going to start with one of the greatest works that happens: *when we love each other in unity*. When people who might be natural enemies in the minds of the world are actually together, in one family, loving each other, unified by the beautiful truth that we have been saved by God's good grace. That's a good work, when we love each other in unity.

He's going to talk about the good work of *moral purity*. We're going to be putting off the old sinful habits and putting on brand new habits that are pleasing to God. He's going to talk about the good work of *the way we care and sacrifice for each other the way Jesus cared and sacrificed for us*. He's going to talk about the good works that are to be displayed in our homes, families, marriages, and workplaces as employees and employers, and the good works we are to do in those places.

He's going to talk, in chapter 6, about the good work of *spiritual warfare and prayerful lives that resist the temptations of the Devil and the lies about Jesus and continue to believe*. In chapter 6, he's going to cap off all of the good works with that of his masterpieces *enduring and persevering in the face of trial, tribulation, and even persecution*.

Those are the beautiful good works that are common to all of God's children. Yet there are also good works that are unique to some of God's specific masterpieces. Not all of us are called to do the same specific works for God. For instance, God's call and work for some of you is to be a missionary on the mission field somewhere. For others of you, it could be a very specific ministry involvement. Maybe God has called you to learn how to counsel people using your Bible, helping people who are struggling or suffering due to sin.

For others of you, it may be getting involved in the fight to stop human trafficking and sex trafficking of women and children. For others of you, it may be the specific calling and work of adoption or foster parenting. For others of you, it could be a political career where you want to influence decision-makers in our world. It might be helping people with special needs to hear about Jesus or to be able to come to church. There are many different volunteer works of service to which God might be calling you specifically.

The trouble with this conversation is that some of you are thinking right now... Maybe not all of you, but there are some of you who are thinking, "You know, Steve, when I look at my life, I don't necessarily see a masterpiece. I don't see a work of art. My life is so broken and empty. There are so many let-downs, disappointments, and failures in my life."

That's common, because when we look at ourselves, we tend to see all of our flaws, don't we? We see the so many things that need to change or that are lacking in our character and our accomplishments, but God says, "You are *my* work of art. You are *my* masterpiece. You are *my* handiwork. That's what God says about you. You see, God's not like many modern-day parents today who are oblivious to their child's faults. "Little Junior, perfect in all his ways." Do you know any parents like that?

God isn't like that. He's your all-knowing, all-powerful God. He's your Father in heaven who can envision what you will be when it's all said and done. He can look ahead and know what he's creating in you because the paint isn't dry yet. Your Father in heaven can see what you can accomplish before you can actually see it, and that accomplishment comes through the good works he has planned for you in advance to do.

The whole beautiful and miraculous masterpiece of God is a work that's always progressing in sanctification. We're not only a brand-new creation; we now truly want to do good things for God's kingdom. Those good things prepared for us to do shine like a floodlight on the greatest masterpiece of God: you, re-created in Christ Jesus.

These good works are meant for you to walk in, because when you are doing the good works God has prepared for you to do, it is like a giant floodlight shining on you, the most amazing complexity and miracle in the universe, a re-created human being doing good things for God, God's people, and the world. You! Little old you. Wow! He took us while we were spiritually dead in our sins and made us alive again with Jesus.

There's good news and bad news to all this. The good news: hundreds of you are already walking in those good works God has given you to do. Hundreds of you in this room are serving, and

you're doing gospel work. You're serving God's people. You're involved with ministries and volunteering. You're doing things with the masterpiece of your re-creation for God's glory and the gospel.

The bad news is that hundreds of you in this room are not. I'm not saying you're a bad, evil, or wicked person. I'm saying you're not doing the works God has given you to do. You see, God expects a 100 percent employment rate in his church, and the truth is too many of you have been spiritually unemployed for way too long.

My prayer for you is that you would hear James ask you, "Show me your faith without your works. Where is it? Faith is a verb, not a noun. Where is your faith?" My prayer is that you would hear that question and say, "Yeah, I have been unemployed in the work of God for too long." You are God's masterpiece, and the paint isn't dry. He has re-created you in Christ to do good works and walk in them for his glory so everyone can see what God has done.

My specific challenge to you, if you're spiritually unemployed, is to call the church this week. Email the church and say, "I need work. Put me to work." You can come to church next Sunday with a cardboard sign: "Need work." We'll put you to work. I hope the inbox or the voicemail at the church is blown up this week by hundreds of you willing to say, "Unemployed. Need some work. What do you want me to do?" I pray that's the result of you looking in the mirror and saying, "Wow! God did all that for me by his grace!" Let's pray.

Lord, I ask that your Holy Spirit would move in a mighty way, that this would not just be a quick, emotional moment but would be a deep, joyful conviction that you're not done with us yet and you continue to make us into these beautiful works of art so we can shine like bright lights in our world, all pointing to the miracle you have done. You have made us new. In Jesus' name, amen.

If you find yourself right now desiring to give your heart to Jesus, you're realizing, "Well, I can tell you right now I'm not a masterpiece. I've never repented of my sin. I have not asked Jesus to save me. I have not surrendered my life to him." If your heart is beating a little faster when that conversation comes up, I want to encourage you to come up to one of these people up here. They are standing here for that reason. They get it.

If you want to just say, "Hey, I need to start today. What's the first step? I want Jesus to save me. I want to be one of God's masterpieces. How do I do that?" That's why they're here. I hope you'll come. If you just need someone to pray for you, maybe you're facing something rough this week and you just say, "Please pray for me." They'd love to do that as well. I'm looking forward to seeing you Friday night. See you then.