

# God's Plan of Reconciliation

## God's Workmanship

*Ephesians 2:10*

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# God's Workmanship

## Scripture

We are currently in a series of sermons on Ephesians 2 that I am calling, "God's Plan of Reconciliation."

The theme of Ephesians 2:1-10 is God's grace in saving sinners. In verses 1-3 Paul described the way we were before we received the amazing grace of God. In verse 4 Paul started to explain how God saves sinners. In verses 5-7 Paul listed some wonderful truths about our union with Christ. In verses 8-9 Paul summarized how we are saved by grace alone. Then, in verse 10 Paul stated that our salvation is all because of God's workmanship.

Let's read about God's workmanship in Ephesians 2:10. For the sake of context, let's begin reading in verse 1:

<sup>1</sup> And you were dead in the trespasses and sins <sup>2</sup>in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience – <sup>3</sup>among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. <sup>4</sup> But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, <sup>5</sup> even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ – by grace you have been saved – <sup>6</sup> and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup> so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. <sup>8</sup> For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, <sup>9</sup> not a result of works, so that no one may boast. <sup>10</sup> **For we are his**

**workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.** (Ephesians 2:10)

## Introduction

Michelangelo (1475-1564) was a Florentine sculptor, painter, architect, and poet of the High Renaissance who exerted an unparalleled influence on the development of Western Art. Considered to be the greatest living artist during his lifetime, he has since been described as one of the greatest artists of all time. Michelangelo was once asked what he was doing as he chipped away at a shapeless rock. He replied, "I'm liberating an angel from this stone."<sup>1</sup>

The Apostle Paul would say that is like what God is doing in the life of every Christian. God takes every born-again believer and slowly fashions him or her to look more and more like Jesus Christ. In other words, God has not only brought us to himself in salvation, he also continues to work in us after we are regenerated. He is the one who is working in us enabling us to do good works in Christ Jesus.

## Lesson

Ephesians 2:10 shows us that our good works are the products of God's grace.

Let's use the following outline:

1. God's Role in Our Salvation (2:10a)
2. Our Responsibility in Our Salvation (2:10b)

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<sup>1</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Ephesians: The Mystery of the Body of Christ*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1990), 84.

## I. God's Role in Our Salvation (2:10a)

First, let's look at God's role in our salvation.

It is important to understand the Apostle Paul's argument to the Ephesian Christians in Ephesians 2:1-10. Paul was writing to people who were already Christians. He wanted them to understand God's plan of reconciliation. He wanted them to know what God had done in saving them. So, he began in verses 1-3 with a description of their status prior to their receiving the amazing grace of God in their lives. Paul said that they were dead in the trespasses and sins in which they once walked. Spiritually, they were completely cut off from God. They had no relationship with God at all because they were like cadavers. And worse than their own condition was the fact that they were under the wrath of God, like the rest of mankind. Their condition prior to their salvation was utterly hopeless. All the members of the Ephesian Church would have been able to affirm without hesitation our first membership vow, "Do you acknowledge yourselves to be sinners in the sight of God, justly deserving his displeasure, and without hope save in his sovereign mercy?"

In verse 4 Paul began to explain how God saves sinners. He said that God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved them, even when they were dead in their trespasses, made them alive together with Christ. He made it clear that their salvation, from first to last, was a work of God alone. In fact, twice in this paragraph he said to them, "By grace you have been saved."

Then, in verses 5-7 Paul told them about their union with Christ. Their salvation was secure because what God had done to his Son, Jesus Christ, he had done to them. In fact, there were no words to describe what God had done to them, so

Paul made up three new words. He said that the Christians in Ephesus were resurrected with Christ, ascended with Christ, and seated with Christ in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

In verses 8-9 Paul summarized that their salvation was by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, and not by works at all. In other words, their salvation was monergistic; that is, God acted alone in their salvation. Christians contribute nothing to their salvation. Salvation is not the result of works. God's standard for salvation is perfection. And no amount of good works adds up to God's requirement.

James Montgomery Boice tells the story of his predecessor, Donald Grey Barnhouse, who illustrated our failure by reference to an old-fashioned scale – the kind in which grocers used to measure out sugar, salt, and other dry foods. A pound weight was put on one side of the scale. The sugar was poured out on the other side until the arms balanced. Barnhouse compared the pound weight to God's righteousness, the standard which his own holy nature demands. That pound of righteousness is placed on one side of the scale, and we are invited to place our "good works" on the other.

The worst elements of society come first – thieves, perverts, murderers, sinners of all kinds. They are not without any human goodness. They have perhaps one or two ounces. But their works do not balance the scale. These people are set aside and thus pass under God's just condemnation.

Next come ordinary folks, people like us. They are better than the "great" sinners. They have perhaps eight ounces of human goodness. That makes them four times as good as the ones who came first. But their goodness, great as it seems to be, does not balance the scale.

Finally, the morally "great" come forward. They are not perfect; their very "greatness" causes them to recognize that

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fact. But they have twelve or thirteen ounces of good works, and they present them. Will those twelve or thirteen ounces balance God's scale? Not if the pound of righteousness is on the other side! The scale won't balance for them any more than it does for the average folks or great sinners. Therefore, they too are set aside and fall under God's wrath – unless another way of salvation can be found. Barnhouse then says:

But just here God comes with his message of free salvation. Note well, he does not change his standards one whit. The pound of perfection still stands opposite the empty scales. No one has been able to move the balance. But now God is going to move it for us...

Since Christ was the Infinite God, he could die for any number of finite creatures. He could take the eternal punishment of an infinite multitude and expiate it in the hour of his death – so that the weight of our sin was counted over upon him, and all of God's righteousness is now available through him. Now God comes to us with the great invitation, "I want you to be in heaven with me. I love you. It does not make any difference on what plane of life has been your abode." You stand there on the empty scales with nothing but your few ounces to put in and with no possibility of getting anything more. But God says, "I love you; I came to die for you. Look to Calvary. Do you see Christ hanging there? It was for you. Look to the empty tomb. Do you see that he has been raised from the dead? It is the proof," says God, "that I am forever satisfied with what Christ did there on the cross, and I will take that for your side of the scales, if you will throw away all confidence in your own few ounces." And thus we come to Christ... We take that righteousness of God and go boldly or tremblingly to the scales and put it over against all the perfection God has demanded and that he must demand. The balance immediately is made. We stand before God justified, for since the scales are tipped, God can never have anything

against me forever.”<sup>2</sup>

Boice concludes by saying, “A person who will trust that perfect righteousness of Christ, rather than his or her own righteousness is justified. A person who continues to cling to good works in any degree is not justified. Thus, salvation is ‘by grace...through faith’ alone, as Paul says in Ephesians 2:8.”<sup>3</sup>

That brought Paul to verse 10 where he stated the product of God’s grace. He said, **“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”**

The Greek word for **workmanship** is *poiema*. It means “a thing that is made, workmanship.”<sup>4</sup> Interestingly, we derive our English word *poem* from this Greek word. So, some have tried to translate verse 10 as follows, “For we are his poem.” The reason that is an unhelpful translation is because for us a poem is a composition in verse, when in fact the Greek word meant any work of art. It could mean a poem (as we think of a poem), but it could also mean a statue, song, painting, or architecture.

Many commentators note that the best translation of verse 10 is given by F. F. Bruce. He said that we are “his work of art, his masterpiece.”<sup>5</sup> Think of that! We are God’s work of art, his masterpiece! I agree with Kent Hughes, who said, “I do not think there is any more exalted description of a believer in all of Scripture. You and I are God’s works of art – his masterpieces!”<sup>6</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Donald Grey Barnhouse, *How God Saves Men* (Philadelphia: The Bible Study Hour, 1955), 33–34.

<sup>3</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *Ephesians: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Ministry Resources Library, 1988), 70–71.

<sup>4</sup> James Strong, *A Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Greek Testament and The Hebrew Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2009), 59.

<sup>5</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Ephesians* (London: Pickering & Inglis, 1973), 52.

<sup>6</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Ephesians: The Mystery of the Body of Christ*, Preaching the Word, 82.

The first question in *The Catechism for Young Children* asks, “Who made you?” The answer is, “God.” The second question asks, “What else did God make?” And the answer is, “God made all things.” God created all things. Everything in all of creation was created by God. The Psalmist affirms, “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork” (Psalm 19:1). Every electron, neutron, proton, atom, star, sun, planet, and galaxy was created by God.

And yet, as wonderful and amazing as all creation is, it is not his masterpiece. Consider the birth of a baby. Each baby is an astonishing work of art – the eyes, hands, feet, lungs, soft cuddly hair. Consider just one aspect of God’s creation of a baby. Kent Hughes says,

Its mind is an amazing computer recording virtually everything it experiences. Its eyes pass on incredible amounts of data – first through the cornea, then through the focusing lens where the image strikes the retina, stimulating 125 million nerve endings simultaneously. This is processed by millions of micro switches and funneled down the optic nerve, which contains one million separate insulated fibers (so there are no short circuits). When the information reaches the brain, an equally complex process begins – all of which takes place in a millisecond! Likewise, the infant’s ears are so tuned to the vibrating around her that one day she will make music.<sup>7</sup>

Every mother goes through the agony of birth to hold a precious child in her arms. God’s creation of human life is the pinnacle of his creation. And yet, even as amazing as is the creation of human life, that is not God’s masterpiece.

The Apostle Paul said in verse 10a, **“For we are his**

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<sup>7</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Ephesians: The Mystery of the Body of Christ*, Preaching the Word, 82–83.



**workmanship.”** Who are the “we”? The “we” are born-again, justified believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. God’s supreme work of art, his masterpiece, is every person who, even though dead in trespasses and sins, has been made alive in Christ Jesus.

Did you know that every Christian has been created twice? *First, every person is created physically.* Paul said in Colossians 1:16–17, “For by him [i.e., Christ] all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities – all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.” *And second, every Christian is created spiritually.* Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5:17, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.” And this second creation occurs when the elect person becomes a Christian. Paul put it this way in Ephesians 2:10, “For we are his workmanship, **created in Christ Jesus....**” God’s workmanship of us involved our union with Christ. So, every Christian is God’s workmanship, God’s work of art, God’s masterpiece.

But, we must ask, to what end? What was God’s purpose for our salvation? What did God intend for us in saving us?

## II. Our Responsibility in Our Salvation (2:10b)

And second, let’s look at our responsibility in our salvation.

The Apostle Paul said in verse 10b, “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus **for good works....**” There it is! That is why God saved us. He saved us **for good works.**

Many people are so confused about good works. All religions teach that good works enable us to achieve salvation.

Most Americans believe that God saves us because of our good works. They believe that our **good works** contribute to our salvation. However, they do not, as John MacArthur said, “Although they have no part in gaining salvation, **good works** have a great deal to do with living out salvation. No **good works** can produce salvation, but many **good works** are produced by salvation.”<sup>8</sup>

*The Westminster Confession of Faith* devotes an entire chapter to good works. Paragraph 2 states the following about good works, “These good works, done in obedience to God’s commandments, are the fruits and evidences of a true and lively faith: and by them believers manifest their thankfulness, strengthen their assurance, edify their brethren, adorn the profession of the gospel, stop the mouths of the adversaries, and glorify God, whose workmanship they are, created in Christ Jesus thereunto, that, having their fruit unto holiness, they may have the end, eternal life.”<sup>9</sup>

Paul also said about these good works, “... **which God prepared beforehand**” (2:10b). Before you became a Christian, in fact, before the creation of the world, God designed you to serve him. As Kent Hughes says, “Each of us has an eternally-designed job description which includes the task, the ability, and the place to serve.”<sup>10</sup> Every Christian, whether young or old, must be active in ministry. Don’t wait until you hear an audible voice that you think is God telling you what you should be doing. Just serve! When someone asks you to help in children’s ministry, or youth ministry, or Bible study, or hospitality, or music, do it! Until you learn your spiritual gift,

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<sup>8</sup> John F. MacArthur Jr., *Ephesians*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 62.

<sup>9</sup> *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1996).

<sup>10</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Ephesians: The Mystery of the Body of Christ*, Preaching the Word, 85.

serve in whatever way you can. And over time you will learn what those good works are that God has prepared for you to produce.

Finally, I want you to notice how Paul ended this sentence. He said, “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, **that we should walk in them.**” This is so interesting! I love what John Stott said about this phrase. He said:

Thus, the paragraph ends as it began with our human “walk,” a Hebrew idiom for our manner of life. Formerly we walked in *trespasses and sins* in which the devil had trapped us; now we walk in good *works* which God has eternally planned for us to do. The contrast is complete. It is a contrast between two lifestyles (evil and good), and behind them two masters (the devil and God). What could possibly have effected such a change? Just this: a new creation by the grace and power of God. The key expressions of the paragraph are surely *but God* (verse 4) and *by grace* (verses 5, 8).<sup>11</sup>

## Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed good works in Ephesians 2:10, let us do that which God has made us to do to.

Let me close with a few questions.

*First, are you in Christ?* Are you a new creation? If not, put your trust in Christ today.

*And second, if you are in Christ, are you doing those good works which God prepared beforehand for you to do?* Are you active in serving Christ? If not, start doing so today. Amen.

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<sup>11</sup> John R. W. Stott, *God's New Society: The Message of Ephesians*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 85.

# Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church  
is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ  
and membership in his church family,  
develop them to Christlike maturity,  
equip them for their ministry in the church  
and life mission in the world,  
in order to magnify God's name.*

## Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

This sermon, and other sermons, by the Rev. Freddy Fritz can  
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1. [www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons](http://www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons).
2. [www.sermoncentral.com/contributors/freddy-fritz-sermons-11181.asp](http://www.sermoncentral.com/contributors/freddy-fritz-sermons-11181.asp).
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