

## Ephesians 2C

- As we began our study in Ephesians, you may remember I opened with some background on the history of the church of Ephesus
  - I said the church of Ephesus was located in a wealthy culture full of temptations
    - If you were a Christian in Ephesus, you might be tempted to compete for the potential prestige and wealth of the city
    - And a church meeting in the city might be tempted to measure its success by the standards embraced by the culture
    - In short, you faced temptations to live like Ephesus and look like Ephesus
  - Over time, these temptations conspired to lead the church into leaving its first love of serving Christ, according to Revelation
    - They respected the word of God, Paul told us
    - They couldn't tolerate false teachers
    - And there is no reason to think the believers in Ephesus were idle
    - They were at work, no doubt, but they weren't working on the right things
  - They drifted away from the mission of serving in Christ's name
    - In its place, they may have done social works, or simply no works
    - Perhaps they merely served their own desires
    - Paul's parting words to the church in Acts seem to suggest this concern

**Acts 20:35** "In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

- Paul's final words to the church admonished them to seek service over wealth
  - It would seem Paul had reasons to think the church might have decided that receiving things themselves was better than giving to others

- But I think his concern went far deeper than merely money
- The problem was one of works too
- Jesus said this church left its first love of serving Him, and I believe He meant both with their wealth and with their time
- We know our use of money reflects our heart, as Jesus said we cannot serve God and money
  - But how we spend our time is just as powerful a measure of our heart as money
  - Because in many ways, time is more valuable to us than money
- There's always more money to be gained if we set our mind to it
  - But there is a finite amount of time in our life
  - Every day has only 86,400 seconds
  - Every year has 365 days
  - And every life has only so many years
  - When it's gone, it's gone
- When we're stingy with our time, we're being stingy with our most powerful and important resource
  - That's why Paul has spoken so forcefully to this church in Chapters 1 and 2 about the origins of their faith
    - Paul said they were in Christ because of the work of God making them alive
    - He gave them saving faith and brought them into a new eternal future with Christ
    - They will have what Christ has received
    - And they have it because of His power, not their own
  - So what do we owe a God Who has saved us and given us so much?
    - Do we not owe Him our very lives?
    - As Paul says in Romans 12

**Rom. 12:1** Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.

- The Lord expects every believer to respond to His grace with a life lived for His glory
  - Each of our lives will take a certain path
  - Our family lives will be different, our careers and personal pursuits will vary
  - But as Christians, we have one major thing in common: we all are called to serve a Lord Who asks us to be His hands and feet
- So no matter what else in life we choose, we are all expected to give Christ our lives in service – whether as a vocation or as a volunteer
  - He gave His life for us, so we give our lives to Him
  - He should remain our first love, our priority
  - And that brings us to v.10 of Chapter 2, where Paul explains how we are to live in service to Christ

**Eph. 2:10** For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

- In the preceding two verses Paul explained we were saved by His grace, receiving our salvation as a gift, which God manifested in us through faith in His Son
  - We did absolutely nothing to bring about our salvation
    - God is sovereign in our salvation
    - He stepped into our lives, forever altering our path, bringing us out of death and into life
    - He saved us when we weren't even looking for Him, Paul says in Romans 3
    - And He did it because He is rich in mercy and loved us
  - And now Paul says God did these things because the Lord desired to be glorified through us

- We are His workmanship, created in Christ so we could walk in good works
- And these works were prepared beforehand for us
- Let's understand what Paul is saying
  - First, Paul says we are His workmanship
    - The Greek word for workmanship appears only twice in the New Testament, here and in Romans
    - In both cases, the word refers to the masterwork of a craftsman
    - Like a delicate piece of furniture or a marble statue or a fine painting
    - These things reflect glory upon the one who made them because they testify to the genius and vision and artistry of their creator
  - Paul says we too are the exquisite product of a Master craftsman
    - Paul's not talking about our physical creation
    - He's talking about our spiritual nature again, and remember that we were born dead in our trespasses and sins
    - We were not a thing of beauty but rather we were children of wrath
  - But by His grace, Paul says God created us anew, spiritually, in Christ Jesus
    - This is why the Bible calls it being born again
    - It's truly like starting over
    - And it's that new form that holds potential to reflect glory to God
    - But only if we live in keeping with that new nature
- So if we are going to fulfill our purpose, we have to show the world the work He has done in us
  - But how do we show off God's handiwork?
    - He has given us a new spirit, a living spirit with the potential to obey His word

- But a spirit is invisible
- And He has brought us into a new life with Christ with a new eternal future
  - But the kingdom has yet to arrive
- And He has given us faith in the meantime to manifest His grace in us
  - But faith in the heart cannot be seen
- So how is the craftsmanship of God to be appreciated?
  - Imagine if Michelangelo painted the Mona Lisa and then it was stuffed away in an attic forever
  - Or his statue of David had been stored in a garage
  - How could we appreciate the skill of the craftsman without the ability to see his handiwork?
- Paul explains that God's miraculous work in us is to be seen and appreciated by our "good works"
  - We discussed works in previous weeks
    - And we learned that a human work is anything we might do or say or even think
    - And that these works had nothing to do with our salvation
    - Because the works of unbelievers are like filthy garments to God
  - Furthermore, our works had nothing to do with our salvation
    - We were saved by the grace of God alone, Paul said
    - For no one will be permitted to boast of how they arrived in Heaven
  - But now we learn that our good works aren't irrelevant to our salvation
    - Works are the way we bring glory to the God Who saved us
    - And if so, then it stands to reason that the kinds of things we think and say and do following salvation should be different than those we did prior to salvation

- That if we are to bring glory to the Father by showing His craftsmanship in Christ, we must reflect that change in our works
- So at this point we may be tempted to think we just need to get busy serving Christ
  - Let's go do something! Let's do works!
    - Let's start acting different, let's start talking different, let's look like Christians
    - Well not so fast
    - That's called acting or worse, it's hypocrisy, and it's the farthest thing from good works
  - In a way, it's the equivalent to trying to earn your salvation
    - The Lord said you can't earn salvation, since our works do not please Him
    - And likewise, you cannot bring Him glory by trying to work your own sanctification
    - God brings us the faith that saves, and He brings us the works that please Him
- Paul says the good works we do to bring God glory are works prepared beforehand by God so that we might walk in them
  - Throughout this book we've been confronted, and maybe challenged, by the sovereignty of God
    - We've learned that God predestined us to salvation
    - That we were chosen in Christ Jesus to receive what we have
    - That even our faith is not of ourselves
  - And that revelation makes us uncomfortable, I'm sure
    - It may disagree with what someone taught you in the past
    - Or perhaps these concepts seem contrary to what you concluded by our own reading of the Bible
    - It's an unsettling experience to learn we didn't get the full story the first time or that our understanding of the Bible was incomplete

- It may even cause you to doubt what we're learning now
- I know the feeling because I was once there myself
  - And I compare the experience of coming to appreciate the sovereignty of God to someone standing inside a circle drawn in the dirt
    - We draw the circle around ourselves and we conclude that everything outside the circle is God's
    - He controls the world and the forces of nature
    - He controls the heavenly realms
    - He directs nations
    - He brings all things to good in the end, etc.
  - And then we tell ourselves that everything inside the circle belongs to us and is under the control of our free will
    - We are in control of who we are and where we will live and what we will do
    - We run our lives and we make our mistakes
    - And perhaps we also believe that we decide whether we to accept or reject Jesus
    - We know God is all powerful, but we tell ourselves that God has left these things for us, that He stays out of the way
    - That He "respects" our free will
  - But then we turn to scripture and we read things like:

**Prov. 16:9** The mind of man plans his way,  
But the Lord directs his steps.

**Prov. 19:21** Many plans are in a man's heart,  
But the counsel of the Lord will stand.

- Suddenly we realize that even the plans we make are controlled by the sovereignty of God
- We didn't sense His control, certainly, because that's not how God works

- He's so powerful, He can direct our thoughts and actions to accomplish His desires without us even knowing it
- And so we erase our little circle and redraw it a little closer to ourselves
  - We relinquish a little of that control, because scripture makes us do it
    - But we hold on to the rest, still certain that God shares control with us
    - We're a little uncomfortable, but we go on reading the Bible
  - Then we read about Joseph's life and how his brother's conspired to kill him by sending him to Egypt, and yet later Joseph says this:

**Gen. 50:18** Then his brothers also came and fell down before him and said, "Behold, we are your servants."

**Gen. 50:19** But Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid, for am I in God's place?"

**Gen. 50:20** "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive."

- Now we realize that even the evil things men do by their free will fall under God's sovereign control and fit into His plan
- And so we erase our little circle and redraw it a little closer to ourselves
- Then we read Paul tell us that we were chosen before the foundations of the earth to receive a salvation brought to us by the Spirit of God
  - And so we erase our smaller circle and redraw it even closer to ourselves
  - By now, we're standing on barely a patch of earth, clinging to one last idea
  - The idea that at least the good works I do for God are of my own choosing
  - I'm in control of how I serve God, right?
- And then the Lord tells us that even the good works we do for Him are works that God Himself has prepared for us to do
  - Paul is explaining that God has determined beforehand what works He will accept from us



- We can't make up our own works
- We can't decide for ourselves what God wants us to do
- We either follow Him in doing the works He has prepared for us to walk in, or we go our own way which is called disobedience
- Let me explain how this works using another analogy
  - Imagine going to lunch at a cafeteria restaurant (or buffet)
  - People like these restaurants because the food is usually pretty good
  - More importantly, we like being able to see it before we eat it
- That food was prepared for us beforehand
  - They don't make the food according to our desires
  - You can't order off the menu
  - There is no menu...there's just the food they decided to prepare beforehand sitting there in those stainless trays
- It's up to us to choose what we want, yes, but our choices are limited by what the restaurant decided to prepare beforehand
  - We can take a few things or if we have the appetite, we can take a lot of things
  - The more we take, the more we will experience what the restaurant has to offer
  - Our will has a place in the process...it determines what we select
  - But our will doesn't create the options
- Now imagine if I decided I didn't like what the restaurant offered, so I brought a sack lunch with me into that restaurant
  - I sat down at a table and began to eat
    - I suspect the restaurant management would not be very pleased
    - They would tell me that I can't bring my own food into their restaurant

- If you want to do your own thing, go elsewhere they would tell me
- I think that analogy accurately reflects what Paul means when he says that we were created to walk in good works that God has prepared for us beforehand
  - God knew He would bring you salvation from before the foundations of the Earth
    - So that in a day He appointed, the Spirit came to you, gave you new life and brought you the gift of faith
    - You awoke to the truth of the Gospel
    - And by your faith you live as a testimony of God's grace
  - Now you have a mission to reflect glory upon the God Who saved you
    - But His sovereignty doesn't end with your salvation
    - He has prepared a menu of good works that He desires you and I would accomplish in bringing Him glory
  - This menu of good works is one the Lord set before us
    - Because these works are the best ways we can glorify Him and serve His purpose in blessing others through us
    - We don't get to define our own path of good works but we do get to choose which ones we will do
- So the Lord has set before you a buffet of opportunities for how you can serve the Lord during your Christian life
  - Your ticket to this buffet is your faith, because without faith it's impossible to please God
    - But through faith, you may serve Him in the ways He determined
    - You might imagine that on this buffet are works of prayer, service, teaching, counsel, giving, and more
    - These works have been prepared for you because they fit your abilities, they cater to your spiritual gifting
  - More importantly, they are designed to promote the spiritual growth inside you that the Lord desires to accomplish
    - Now you can eat as much as you want

- The more you eat, the stronger you will become spiritually
- And the more blessed you will be for having served the Lord
- When you pass something up, you're missing out
- This is the reason churches shouldn't hire out for basic service needs
  - Don't hire someone to cut the grass
  - Don't hire janitors
  - Ask the congregation to serve in those things because those may be the works on their buffet
  - This is where they may find their opportunities for sanctification, and to do otherwise is outsourcing their sanctification
- But the key again is we can't create our own good works, our own menu
  - God desires we obey him by serving where He desires
    - We can't substitute our own ideas for what God may want from us
    - And then try to justify our decision by claiming we are making great sacrifices for God

**1Sam. 15:22** Samuel said,

**"Has the Lord as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices  
As in obeying the voice of the Lord?  
Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice,  
And to heed than the fat of rams.**

- We can't tell God what He values
- We can only obey His commands
- So though there are many good things that we could do, the good works we should do are those God has prepared for us to do
  - And yes, we have a degree of free will in this matter
  - You can choose from among the things God has appointed for you
  - Or you could choose to do nothing or to do your own things

- And no, you can never exhaust the buffet for there will always be more to do
- Because God has designed it just for you
- And this makes perfect sense when you consider that God also chooses how to gift us and where to place us in the world
  - Some believers are given buffets filled with glorious works to perform
    - Men like Martin Luther, Jonathan Edwards, Charles Spurgeon and Billy Graham
    - God equips men like these with great gifts of oratory, leadership and courage
    - They brought Christ glory through their history-changing work while facing great burdens and personal sacrifices
    - They had an incredible buffet set for them, but they still had to pick the tray and walk that line
  - Others are given buffets of “ordinary,” common works
    - Moms and dads raising godly children
    - Believers volunteering at church to mow grass, print bulletins, play music, change diapers
    - Retirees sending small checks to distant missionaries
    - Parents sending children to witness in distant lands
    - Missionaries dying lonely in forgotten villages
  - These men and women had a far different buffet set for them, but they too had to walk in faith doing as God called them to do
    - Martin Luther or Bill Graham couldn’t walk your path in life and you can’t walk theirs
  - And everyone has equal potential to be blessed and rewarded by their works
    - We aren’t graded against other believers, but only against what opportunities God gave us
  - But one thing is true for everyone

- We all were created to walk in good works
- And no Christian has the option of saying no to Christ
- You might ask, how do we know what God has prepared for us?
  - The simple answer is we don't, not until we start serving somewhere somehow
    - By that I mean you have to begin serving to know what God has prepared for you
    - You have to try something to know if it's for you
    - Like sampling a dish to know if it tastes good
    - Volunteer somewhere, sign up for a mission trip, take a step of faith, and always pray for the Lord to reveal His will
    - See where you land and you'll know better what you should do next
  - You'll come to know the general direction you should go when you see your gifts intersecting with your opportunities with a result that produces fruit
    - That fruit will be most visible first in your own sanctification
    - Your first love will grow, you'll want to serve Christ more, and you will come to know Him more
    - Meanwhile, you will find your passions in life changing
    - You will desire sin less and desire for more of God's grace
  - Secondly, as you serve the Lord He brings you joy in the response of those you serve
    - You teach and people learn
    - You pray and people receive the Lord's answer
    - You serve and people are encouraged and blessed
    - You see the Lord turning your meager efforts into something great
- And the more of His prepared works we select, the more opportunity we have to be blessed in these ways

- Both now and in eternity
  - It's my experience that the more of the buffet I sample, the greedier I get
  - The more I want to serve Christ
  - I want to see more of what's on the buffet, because it's all good
- Moreover, I lose interest in spending time eating elsewhere
  - I don't want what the world is serving
  - And I don't want to make up my own good works, works that can't please God because they aren't a matter of faith
  - You see, even after we come to faith, we have to operate in faith or else our works are still filthy garments
  - Being busy isn't the same as being obedient
  - We must seek to remain in His will
- One thing we can say though...no Christian has the option to get out of line
  - After all, we were created specifically for good works
    - You were saved for that very purpose
    - So if you're just nibbling at the buffet of good works God has placed in front of you, you're missing out on something special
  - Perhaps you weren't aware that God has prepared good works for you
    - Perhaps you didn't know that every believer has this expectation, that good works is not optional
    - Well, now that you've heard the counsel of God's word on this point, what excuse will you offer the Lord in that future day?
    - What excuse can we have for sitting on the sidelines?
  - Let's not pursue our own agenda in life
    - Let's fulfill our purpose in the salvation we've been given
    - Let's each make it our goal to understand what gifts we've been given

- And what works God has prepared beforehand for us to accomplish
- And let's put our hand to the plow, as it were, and serve the Master Who bought us by His blood