

We are God's Workmanship
Ephesians 2:1-22
Key Verse: 2:10

In chapter 1 we learned that we have been blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ. What kind of blessings do we have in Jesus? We have the blessings of being adopted, chosen, redeemed and forgiven. God did this so that we may praise his glorious grace. In chapter 2 Paul explains how sin makes us dead but in Christ we are made alive. We are God's workmanship created to do good works. Paul also teaches that Jews and Gentiles can become one in Christ. May God bless us to find his clear purpose in our lives as God's workmanship.

First, dead in sins, alive in Christ (1-7).

What is the condition of a man without Christ? Look at verse 1. "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins." Here the word "you" refers to anyone who is not in Christ. Paul said they are dead in their transgressions and sins. What is sin? Isaiah 59:2 says, "But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear." Sin separates us from God. In the Garden of Eden, Adam lived in the presence of God and enjoyed God's blessings such as his love, care, provision, protection and security. But when Adam sinned against God, he was separated from God and lost all of God's blessings. Most of all, he lost the meaning and purpose of life and became dead in sin.

How did they live when they were spiritually dead? Look at verses 2-3. "...in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath." When we do not follow the ways of God, we give away ourselves to follow the ways of this world and to gratify the cravings of our sinful nature. Without Christ, we are all slaves to our sinful desires such as lust, pleasure seeking, easy going and self glory seeking. Many people think pleasure seeking is a normal life style. But there's a problem. God created man to be happy to the utmost when his inner man grows in the holiness of God more and more. When man lives a pleasure seeking life, it corrupts his heart and makes him miserable. What is worse, he is under God's wrath and he is spiritually dead. A dead person is absolutely helpless and cannot make himself alive. No one can help him either. What did God do for those who were dead in their sins?

Let us read verses 4-5 together. "But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions--it is by grace you have been saved." God made the dead alive. That is a miracle. Only God who is the Creator of all things can make a dead man alive. Jesus said in John 11:25-26, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die." Paul shouted about his new life in Christ in 2 Cor. 5:17. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" What a wonderful grace it is for those dead in sins to be made alive with Christ!

What is the purpose of God's making us alive? Look at verses 6-7. "And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus." By making us alive from the dead, Jesus promoted us to be seated with him in heaven. Wow! To be promoted and seated with a company CEO would be a great honor. How much more honorable and great it is to be seated with Jesus who is the King of kings and Lord of lords. What a great honor we have in Jesus! Once we were objects of God's wrath. Now we are objects of God's honor and glory. The primary purpose of our new life is to show his rich grace and kindness in Christ. God wants each one of us to be made alive and to show the world what terrible sinners we were and what a marvelous work he is able to do. This is the purpose of making us alive in Christ.

Second, we are God's workmanship (8-10).

Look at verses 8-9. "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." Why did Paul emphasize again that it is by grace we have been saved? He did not give us any room to boast about our salvation or to become self-righteous in our achievements. Someone may think, "I deserve to be saved because I go church every Sunday. Another may think, "I deserve to be saved because I write my Bible testimony every week or I write better than him or I raised more disciples than him." If so, I would be saved not by grace but by my works or achievements.

Then what was God's purpose for our salvation? Let us read verse 10. "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." God saved us as his workmanship to do good works. What does workmanship mean? Workmanship is something made or produced. According to Greek, it means a "poem." That means we are supposed to be something beautiful! We are not just a simple product, but a masterpiece. For example we call the paintings of Michaelangelo or Da Vinci "masterpieces." Paul declares that we are God's masterpieces. God is the Workman and we are his workmanship, the product of the workman. In other words, God is the potter and we are the clay. A potter takes a lump of clay in his hands and molds and shapes it until it is done according to his plan and design. Likewise God took dead people and made them beautiful and praiseworthy by making them alive. God is working hard to remold and shape us according to his perfect plan and design.

How did we become God's workmanship? We became God's workmanship when we were created in Christ Jesus. No one becomes God's workmanship by his own decision or just because he is born of Christian parents. Originally God created us, but we became slaves to sin and spiritually dead. So God recreated us in Christ Jesus. Those who are new creations in Christ Jesus—in other words, those who have the salvation grace in Christ Jesus—are God's workmanship.

Why did God make us his workmanship? God has a purpose for us to do good works. God is the God of purpose. He does not do anything without purpose. Before creating the first man Adam, God already had in mind what work Adam would do. God made him to be a ruler and steward of God's world. When God brought Israel out of 400 years of slavery in Egypt, his purpose was to make them a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Before Paul's conversion, he was an enemy of Christ. He persecuted Christians, thinking he was doing a service for God. But after meeting the Risen Jesus, he found his true purpose of life from Jesus. Jesus said, "This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel." (Ac 9:15) There are many works to do in this world. But the meaning of our existence comes only from doing good works God prepared for us to do. We find the purpose of life and true happiness when we do the good works which God wants us to do.

The phrase, "... which God prepared in advance for us to do," has deep spiritual meaning. Through this we can understand the meaning of suffering and remove the root of bitterness from our hearts. In the world there are many suffering people. Some of them made success after much suffering. But the problem is that they became bitter instead of thankful, only remembering their suffering. But there is God's great purpose even in our suffering.

This verse reminds us of Dr. Samuel Lee, the founder of our ministry. His mother died when he was 9 months old. His stepmother mistreated him and forced him to work and earn money for his schooling. By sheer determination, Dr. Lee finished his GED and entered a university. There he studied John's gospel with an American missionary and he accepted Jesus as his personal Savior, through John 1:4, "In him was life, and that life was the light of men." In Jesus he found the purpose of his life, and he decided to become a servant of God. But one thing still bothered him. Why did he have to suffer so much from his childhood? But when he read Ephesians 2:10, he was struck by the last part, "which God prepared in advance for us to do." The words, "in advance," solved his bitterness problem. He realized that God made him suffer in advance so that he could be well prepared as one who could understand the hungry and sorrowful. Since then, God used him so preciously as a good shepherd for many sorrowful people in Korea as well as America and in many countries.

Third, one in Christ (11-22).

What was the condition of the Gentiles before they came to Christ? In verses 11-12, Paul urged the Ephesians Christians to remember their past status before conversion, so that they may renew their relationship with Christ. Especially Paul mentions about the privileges of the Jews which the Gentiles did not have, such as citizenship in Israel. Many people want to have U.S. citizenship because it gives them many privileges. One missionary has to pay \$7000 in tuition fees while a U.S. citizen pays only \$2500. In addition, the Gentiles were excluded from God's covenant promise, God's hope, and most of all God himself. But what is their present status? Look at verse 13. "But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ." Through the blood of Christ, the Gentile Christians became God's covenant people and received the same privileges as the Jews. Through the blood of Christ, both the Jews and the Gentiles are treated equally by God. What did Jesus do to create one new man in us?

Look at verses 14-15a. "For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations." Until Jesus came, the Jews and the Gentiles had erected a dividing wall of hostility against each other. But God opened the way for both the Jews and the Gentiles to come to him through the forgiveness of their sins on the cross of Jesus. Only when they accepted Jesus' death for their sins could the Jews see the Gentiles with the grace of God and vice-versa. Both Jews and Gentiles could come to God on their knees calling him, "Abba Father."

There are many barriers and walls of hostility in this world. Karl Marx viewed the barriers of the class between the haves and have-nots as man's fundamental problem. Lenin founded the communism system to destroy the class barriers between the rich and the poor. But it didn't work. How about American democracy? One bumper sticker says, "Under Republicans, man exploits man. Under Democrats, it's the exact opposite." The U.S. military has invested much money and many precious lives in Iraq and Afghanistan to restore peace. But still the bloody war is going on. Only Jesus can break all these barriers and walls of hostility and make peace.

Look at verse 15b. "His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace." Here 'one' means there is only one group in Jesus. There are no racial, cultural, ethnic, or class divisions in Jesus. Jesus unified us through his death on the cross. There is only one family, one race, one church and one community in Jesus because he created one new man out of the two. What is in common between P. Kevin Albright and me? We are different in background, education, color and language. But we are one in Jesus. He is my brother in Jesus. Right now, UBF members from many different nations are gathered in Mexico because we are one in Jesus. Christians all are one big family of God and we are all brothers and sisters in Jesus. Please say to your neighbor, "Hello, brother [Russ]! Hello, sister [Helen]!" Just as parents want their children to get along and be one, God also wants his children to get along and be one. This was Jesus' prayer topic for the believers before he went to the cross. He said, "I pray also for those who believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one." (Jn 17:20) Jesus was crucified on the cross so that both God and man, and man and man can be one (16). Jesus made it possible for us to come to God and call him, "Abba, Father." (18)

As a result, what privilege did the Gentile believers get? Look at verses 19-22. Jesus created a new community of people, called his church, in which we all become fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household. The foundation of this new community is the apostles and prophets who received and delivered the word of God. Jesus is the chief cornerstone for the church. As the stones in the building join together, each member is precious in this new Christian community. This illustration emphasizes the unity and co-working of believers. Our many different talents come together to form a vessel where the Holy Spirit dwells in our midst. This is the temple of God and the house of God.

In conclusion, we were dead in our transgressions and sins, but God made us alive in Christ. Now in Jesus, we have God's purpose as his workmanship to do good works. God is the Master Workman working to produce something beautiful in our lives. Doing good works God prepared in advance for us is the meaning of our existence and true source of happiness. God has a wonderful plan for all of us. Praise God for making us his workmanship. May God help us to accept his workmanship and use all of us to be a part of his great plan and fulfill God's purpose.