

WE ARE GOD'S WORKMANSHIP

Ephesians 2:1-22

Key Verse: 2:10

"For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

It is evident that Paul was very old and tired, and he was in prison, and he did not have any desk to write on. The content seems to be an impromptu speech which reminds Christians in Ephesus, as well as in all the churches that he had pioneered, of the grace of God. This chapter resembles very much Romans chapter 3 and Romans chapter 8. But the main idea is very special which expounds how Jews and Gentiles, who were totally useless, became useful. Paul also explains how unbreakable racial barriers can be destroyed so that Jews and Gentiles could become one. Even all people of the whole world become one in Christ Jesus. The purpose of becoming one is that all those who are saved by God may enjoy the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus (7).

First, man without Christ (1-3).

Look at verse 1. "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins...." In this verse, two words are important to know. First, "transgressions" and next, "sins." The word "transgressions" has many theological ideas, but when we study the Bible very carefully, it is intentional disobedience. Transgressions result in missing one's true life goal. Since Adam's Fall, man's mind is crooked. Men are all like Cain, who rejected God's private visitation and heart-breaking counseling and went his own way, even though his life was as miserable as one who committed a crime and received due punishment (Gen 4:13-16). God has made man to live for the glory of God and to become a blessing first to himself, and next to all people. Those whose hearts are crooked in transgressions are those who invite disaster upon themselves. The other word is "sins." The word "sins" also has innumerable interpretations in the theological field. But when we study the Bible, based on Genesis 3, it is precisely cutting the relationship, or separation. 1 John 3:4 says, "...sin is lawlessness." Law is good. Without law, all of us would turn out to be Unabombers. Without the law of gravity, the sun would rise in the west, and flowers would bloom in the winter. Without the law, the whole world would soon be a battleground like Bosnia. But human law is not dependable. The people of Bosnia think they are lawful. And President Yeltsin thinks he is lawful. There must be the law of God. People think believing in Christ is extra labor in this demanding world. But that is not true. Believing in Christ is keeping the law of God, which makes the sun smile, and which makes the beautiful flowers blossom, and which makes

the foliage abundant in the summer, and which makes people sentimental in the autumn, and which makes white snow fall in the winter, and which makes people enjoy peace. Living in Christ is the way to happiness.

Look at verse 2. "...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." In this verse, to understand the phrases, "the ways of this world," and "the kingdom of the air," is important. What is "the ways of this world"? It is common sense that people of the world want to pursue their own happiness. People of the world want to climb up the ladder of their own success. In this world, it is most characteristic of people of the world to pretend to be proud and to have a huge amount of money. This is because the people of the world live before the eyes of other people. So their pretension and hypocrisy are excessive. One old man is very proud that he is a professional gambler. In this country, some states forbid gambling. Some states permit gambling. He doesn't work at something beneficial for other people. He only gambles to experience momentary suspense and to make money. This is really dishonorable. But deceptive people (e.g. CAN) worship those who have money, whoever they may be. "The ways of this world" is well-summarized by the Roman Empire. The Roman Empire declared the peace of Rome. They promised the people of the world that the Roman Empire would "serve and protect" and give peace to all people of the world. But in spite of their political slogan, they killed colonial people mercilessly when they didn't pay social security taxes or did not fulfill army duty for the Roman Empire. The other day an old woman suddenly died in a car accident. Even though she is very rich, she had no time to write a will. Then those who are supposed to get some inheritance all became enemies fighting over how to get the inheritance for themselves only.

Second, "the kingdom of the air." What does "the kingdom of the air" mean? There are so many commentators. But more than 10 commentators didn't explain this part very clearly or skipped this part. But when we study the Bible very prayerfully, we can immediately understand "the kingdom of the air." Here the word "air" refers to the world. In the Bible, the world is compared with a mist. James 4:14b describes mankind and the world as a "mist." It says, "You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes." Here, "mist," "air," or "grass," describe very temporal substances and refer to the world. We committed transgressions. We committed sins. We followed the ways of the world and we became like Satan, because we lived in this world. This world is known as the kingdom of Satan.

People think that death is the end of everything. So they say, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die" (1Co 15:32b). These kind of people are all objects of God's wrath. Look at verse 3. "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." Oscar Wilde (1854-1900) had a brilliant mind and won the highest academic honors. He was a scintillating writer and won the highest awards in literature; he had all the charms in the world and was a man whose instinct it was to be kind. But in his wickedness, he committed homosexuality and by the law of the time he was imprisoned. In his prison diary, he said, "What one has done in a secret chamber, one has someday to cry aloud from the housetops." His description reveals the wrath of God very well. Many people think God is invisible. So there is no wrath of God. But Romans 1:18 says, "The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness...." Godly people have the fear of God in their hearts and want to live for the glory of God. But ungodly people live by the ways of the world under ruler of the kingdom of the air. Man must have hope. But those who are objects of wrath do not have any hope in the world.

Second, by the grace of God (4-10).

Look at verses 4-5. "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." In these verses, Paul insists that it is by the grace of God that we are saved. We have not earned, nor could we have earned it; it is the gift of God, and our part is simply to accept it. Paul's point of view is undeniably true for two reasons. First, God is perfect and therefore, only perfection is good enough for him. Man, by his very nature, cannot bring perfection to God; and so, if ever man is to win his way to God, it must always be God who gives and man who takes. Second, God is love. As we studied, sin is a crime, not against the law, but against love. It is possible to make atonement for a broken law. But it is impossible to make atonement for a broken heart; and sin is not so much breaking God's law as it is breaking God's heart. "Let us take a crude and imperfect analogy. Suppose a motorist, by carelessly driving, kills a child. He is arrested, tried, found guilty, sentenced to a term of imprisonment and/or to a fine. After he has paid the fine and served imprisonment, as far as the law is concerned, the whole matter is over. But it is very different in relation to the mother whose child is killed. He can never put things right with her by serving a term of imprisonment and paying a fine. The only thing which can restore his relationship to her is an act of free forgiveness on her part. This is the way we are to God. It is not God's laws against which we have sinned; it is against God's heart and therefore, only an act of free forgiveness by the grace of God can put us back into the right relationship with him" (W. Barclay).

Works have nothing to do with earning salvation. Still, Paul says that we are recreated by God for good works. It is the famous Pauline

paradox in terms of theology. But Biblically, Paul is more than right. All the good works in the world cannot put us right with God; but there is something radically wrong with the Christianity which makes excuses not to do good works, saying, "If I believe, that's all." Jesus taught us to practice the law of love. There are many laws in the world. As a result, those who are working in the field of the law cannot memorize them all. So they refer to many law books and legal encyclopedias. But the law of God is very simple: Love God and love your neighbor (Mt 22:37-40). There is a lady called "Mrs. Al." She knows the inevitable law of the love of God. She is always ready to help others, even if she has three kids and a prince-like husband. And she is always happy. At the same time, she knows that since she has utter conviction in the love of God, she must spend all her life in trying to be worthy of it. This is our relationship to God. Good works can never earn salvation. But there is something radically wrong if salvation does not produce good works.

Look at 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." This is a summary of part one. Paul clearly plants faith in the flock of God. First, "we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works." What a mysterious secret that we are created in Christ to do good works. There is no other such love for mankind. Suppose God created man in Christ to be miserable, and with hard-earned money, to buy his cave grave for his departure to the unknown world. We cannot but say that this is terrible. God is good. So God has the best purpose in his creation.

The second part of this verse says, "which God prepared in advance for us to do." This verse has a deep spiritual meaning in it. Through this we can understand the meaning of suffering and remove the root of bitterness from our hearts. When we see the world, there are many suffering people. Among many suffering people are some who made success. So they have to be joyful, because they got out of the suffering and now became wealthy. But 99.9% of those who made a success in the time of suffering complain about their past sufferings and amplify their sorrow to the maximum degree. And they forget the fact that from their suffering, by God's grace they become honorable persons. In other words, the root of bitterness in their hearts is not taken away. So they are just the same when they are wealthy as when they were suffering.

But there is God's great purpose for their suffering. In chapter 1, we thought about St. Paul. He was humanly so ambitious that he mastered the philosophies of East and West, plus the Talmud and Torah, and all the details of Judaism. But from God's point of view, his study was not for himself; God wanted to use him as the founder of the theology of Christianity, with which the early Christians could conquer

the whole world.

There are many people who became Christians but did not repent all their sins, or take out the root of bitterness and all the past sufferings. That's not God's purpose. For example, God put his chosen people Israel in slavery in Egypt for 430 years so that they may experience ungodly people's cruelty and deeply realize the grace of God in their hearts and become a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. From God's point of view, 430 years of Israel people's suffering in Egypt was very meaningful in raising mother-like shepherds and Bible teachers for his flock in the whole world. But they couldn't understand this.

There was a skinny young boy who, in his elementary school days, mainly cooked and babysat and took care of the barley field and went to an elementary school. He had no time for homework. So he finished elementary school by the great grace of God. After that, he went into the printing factory and during the daytime earned money for family finances and during the night took care of laundry and cooking for six years and eight months. When he became 19, he was able to handle his personal school expenses by working during the night. He became a radical atheist, thinking that God was unfair. His youth was summarized with two words, "hungry feeling," and "sorrowful mind." But he was more hungry for learning something. In three months, he finished the GED test preparation and passed and went into a university. He studied well at the university, and during the night he became the editor of a Christian publication in Korean. By chance, he met an American missionary and studied John's gospel and accepted Jesus as his personal Savior. When he read John 1:4, "In him was life, and that life was the light of men," he realized that his was not an accidental existence, but in him was God's precious life, and he also had God's light in him. He understood that as much as he accepted God's light as his purpose of life he could be a great man.

So he decided to become a servant of God. But one thing bothered him greatly. It was past suffering. Why did he suffer with hungry feelings? Why was he beaten so much by his step-mother? Why did he have to give all the money he earned to his step-mother? This kind of bitterness hindered his spiritual growth. It remained in his heart for a long time. But when he read Ephesians 2:10, he found heavenly sunshine in his soul. It was the last part of Ephesians 2:10, which says, "God prepared in advance for us to do." The words, "in advance," solved his bitterness problem. He understood the Bible secret that God made him suffer so much in advance so that he could be well-prepared as the one who understands those who are hungry and sorrowful. When he solved his life problem in the Bible, God used him precious.

Third, one in Christ (11-22).

Please read verses 11-13. "Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called 'uncircumcised' by those who call themselves 'the circumcision' (that done in the body by the hands of men)--remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ." In these verses, Paul strongly reminds the Ephesians of their past status before conversion. In Paul's time, circumcision and uncircumcision were a matter of grave importance. Especially, being "covenant people" made the people of Israel never-yielding people in history. And their pride of being chosen people was indeed great, as much as they called non-Israelites "dogs" or "walking animals." Paul's point was not a matter of prejudice. His point is that by the blood of Christ the two become one, that is, the Jews and Gentiles, as well as the Jews and Romans. Finally, we are all brothers and sisters in the blood of Christ. When we study many books, the ceremony of circumcision is meticulous. Even Jesus was circumcised on the eighth day after his birth. Non-Israelites were called "foreigners," who were excluded from the citizenship of the kingdom of God. In the world, the most burdensome problem, even at the present, is the barrier and prejudice and tension between world powers and the tension between family members. Most importantly, just living together without marriage is worse than the ever-increasing divorce rate. They don't want to be one at heart, so they don't marry and just live like dogs, as was predicted by Jean-Paul Sartre.

But our Lord Jesus Christ, the Savior, knew that this barrier between man and man is the most tragic element of human life. First, man broke his relationship with God. Then man began to break relationships between man and man. We don't know about dogs, maybe they are better. Jesus knew that there is no peace in man. So he came down in a human form and was despised and rejected and finally crucified as a criminal. Thus he abolished the barrier of hostility and all the elements of Satan. Look at verse 14. "For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility...." Let's read verse 15. "...by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace...." Therefore, at the birth of Jesus, the host of angels sang, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests" (Lk 2:14). Amen. Amen. Through the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, glory to God and peace on earth. Let's read verse 15 one more time. "...by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace...." It is not easy to make peace among men. Jesus had to be crucified on the cross so that both man and God may be one. Through his cross, he put to death their hostility. Through his

death, he glorified God and gave peace on earth. By his blood he made it possible for us to come to God and call him "Daddy" (18).

Therefore, we must remember that we are God's household and the citizens of the kingdom of God by his blood. Moreover, he gave us a foundation that we should be the apostles of peace on earth. By his blood, the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him we too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit (22).

Let's accept from our hearts that by his blood he made us new creations and we become one and enjoy his divine peace forever.