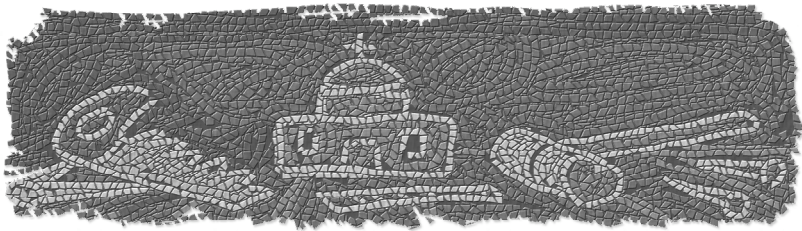


The Church: God's Workmanship



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Rom. 3:24-28; 6:8-11; 2 Cor. 5:18; Eph. 2:1-10; Col. 2:12, 13.*

Memory Text: “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast” (*Ephesians 2:8, 9, NKJV*).

Frenchman Michael Foucault once advocated tearing down all prisons and letting the prisoners go free. Why? Mssr. Foucault believed that concepts of morality, or right and wrong, good and evil, were purely human constructs, human inventions created by people in power in order to keep other people down. Therefore, taking his beliefs to their logical conclusion, he stated that even the idea of criminality was a human invention, and thus all the prisoners should be set free.

However extreme his idea, it's indicative of the prevailing sentiment in many places that there is no such thing as sin and that such ideas as morality and right and wrong are mere opinions, nothing more.

This week's lesson—though ending on a hopeful and positive note—begins with a clear expression of the reality of sin and the inevitability of its consequence: death (which is hardly a human construct, to be sure). This week, let's see what Paul has to say, not only about evil but also about the only solution to it.

The Week at a Glance: Before Christ, what was our condition like? Why and how did God show us grace and mercy? What does being God's workmanship involve? How are we saved?

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 29.*

Dead in Sin (*Eph. 2:1-3*)

From the time Adam and Eve chose to follow their own will instead of God's, sin has become the lot of the human race. "Just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned" (*Rom. 5:12, NKJV*). And because sin is universal (*Rom. 3:23*), death is also.

How do the following texts help us understand the nature of sin?

Isa. 59:2

Rom. 14:23

James 1:15

1 John 3:4

Ephesians 2:2, 3 tells three things about unbelievers. First, they lived "like the rest of the world" (*vs. 2, NLT*) in disobedience to God and disunity among themselves. To be a friend of the world is to be an enemy of God (*James 4:4*), and as enemies they lived a life of darkness and alienation. Second, they followed "the prince of the power of the air" (*Eph. 2:2, NKJV*). The prince is Satan. Jesus called him "the prince of this world" (*John 12:31*). While some would dismiss Satan as a myth, the Bible tells us he is a reality—"a roaring lion," out to devour God's people (*1 Pet. 5:8*), and an "accuser of our brethren" (*Rev. 12:10*) who leads men and women to disobey God (*Eph. 2:2*).

Third, they are corrupt and "by nature children of wrath" (*vs. 3, NKJV*). Sin corrupts everything—mind, thought, action, desire, will, etc.—and, as such, their nature is depraved and within them there is a perpetual conflict. This spiritually corrupt and bankrupt nature makes sinners the "children of wrath" (*vs. 3, NKJV*)—children deserving God's judgment.

So, what is the status of unbelievers? They are dead in sin. They have sealed their own fate by choosing to live "the desires of the flesh" (*vs. 3*) and becoming children subject to God's wrath. They are dead—dead in a sense of finality, humanly speaking.

Look up James 4:4. What does it mean to be "a friend of the world"? How are we, as Christians, to understand this important point (after all, to be a friend of the world is to be at enmity with God), especially in light of John 3:16, which says that God loves the world? Prepare to discuss your answers in class.

“But God . . .”

Paul was a master in conveying God’s great truths. In Ephesians 2:1-3, He describes the pathetic plight of unbelievers: dead in sin, slaves of Satan, walking according to the lusts of the flesh, condemned as children of wrath, hopeless and destitute, unable to save themselves. In verse 4, the apostle introduces the glorious alternative available to this pathetic lot in two dramatic words, “But God.”

These two words may be among the Bible’s most beautiful words. We were dead, “but God”; we were rebels, “but God”; we were under judgment of death, “but God”; we were aliens and strangers, “but God”; Satan may seem triumphant, “but God.” As long as those two words are in biblical vocabulary, we have hope.

Look up the following texts and note how the phrase “but God” is used: Psalm 73:26; Acts 13:29, 30; Romans 5:7, 8; 6:16, 17; Philippians 2:27. What hope is seen there for us?

Why did God come forward to deliver us from the bondage of death? Why did God choose to rescue us from the clutches of sin? Why didn’t He let Adam and Eve perish in their choice? Why didn’t He make Himself new creatures who would love and follow His way?

The apostle provides two answers. First, because God “is rich in mercy” (*Eph. 2:4*). Mercy is intrinsic to the nature of God: (“The Lord your God is a merciful God), He will not forsake you nor destroy you” (*Deut. 4:31, NKJV*), for “He is good! . . . His mercy endures forever” (*Ps. 106:1, NKJV*). Mercy is so important to the salvation process that the redeemed are called “vessels of mercy” (*Rom. 9:23, NKJV*).

Second, “because of His great love with which He loved us” (*Eph. 2:4, NKJV*). God’s love—selfless on the part of the giver, undeserved on the part of the receiver—is the motivation for giving “His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (*John 3:16, NKJV*). God’s “gift of mercy and love is as unconfined as the air, the light, or the showers of rain that refresh the earth.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to the Church*, vol. 9, p. 190.

Write a paragraph that begins, “I [your name] was [talk about your spiritual and mental state before you knew the Lord], but God [now write out what He has done for you through Christ].”

“Made Us Alive” (*Eph. 2:5, NKJV*)

When he speaks of God’s grace, love, and mercy toward sinners, Paul repeatedly uses such superlatives as “riches,” “rich,” “great,” and “exceeding.” Such usage shows the supreme value this former Pharisee placed on salvation as God’s gift and not a result of human works. Ephesians 2:1-8 clearly outlines the movement of sinners from death to life.

Read Ephesians 2:5, 6 and note three things God does for us in Christ. The first few words are given to you.

He has “quickenened us”

He “raised us”

He “made us sit”

In Greek, each of the above phrases begins with the prefix *sun*, meaning “together with.” This indicates that all believers will share these blessings together with one another and together with Christ.

First, He “made us alive together with Christ” (*Eph. 2:5, NKJV*). Those who believe in Christ and die with Him become participants of His resurrection power, and they become spiritually alive together with the risen Lord (*Rom. 6:8-11*).

How have you experienced being “made alive in Christ”?

Second, He “raised us up” (*Eph. 2:6, NKJV*). This raising up in Christ is not without purpose: We are to live for Him. The new life we as Christians enjoy must be a witness to the power of Christ’s resurrection by revealing that power in our life and character.

How have you experienced being “raised up” by Christ?

Third, He “made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (*vs. 6*). The Christian’s ultimate privilege will be that of sitting with Christ and reigning with Him (*2 Tim. 2:12, Rev. 22:5*). Even now we can be examples to the universe of His enduring love and justice. Even now we can sit in “heavenly places” with Jesus when we, by faith, live in intimacy with Him.

How have you experienced this “sitting together” with Jesus now?

By Grace Through Faith *(Rom. 3:24-28; Eph. 2:8, 9; Titus 3:4-7)*

“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast” *(Eph. 2:8, 9, NKJV)*.

These two verses summarize the heart of Paul’s gospel. Paul’s thesis is that grace is God’s part in salvation, faith is the human response, and the entire salvation experience that comes by grace through faith is a gift of God, not of works.

Grace and *faith* are the key words here. How do we understand them?

Grace refers to God’s initiative and the basis of our redemption from sin. As sinners we deserve death, and God offers us life. We are separated from Him and from one another, and He offers us reconciliation. We are under bondage to sin and judgment, and He provides us freedom. We do not deserve any of what He offers, because we have sinned and stand in rebellion against God *(Col. 1:21)*. Hence, grace is often defined as God’s unmerited favor to us.

Grace is God’s sovereign initiative and activity for the salvation of sinners. This grace appeared in the “fullness of the time” *(Gal. 4:4, NKJV)* in the historic event of Jesus Christ—more specifically, the act of Christ on the cross. We have no part in either the conception or execution of salvation. It is God’s gift to “whoever believes” in Jesus *(John 3:16, NKJV)*.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:18. How does this text help us better understand the concept of grace? Who did the reconciling, and for whom?

Faith is the human response to God’s provision. In a Christian sense, faith is not a virtue we develop on our own. It is a response of wonder at what God has done to redeem us from sin and a ready acceptance of God’s operating in our lives. Saving faith is a change of allegiance—from self to God, from denial or indifference to God’s claims to unreserved acceptance. Faith opens the heart to the indwelling of Christ. As such, it cannot originate in the carnal heart. It is “the gift of God, but the power to exercise it is ours. Faith is the hand by which the soul takes hold upon the divine offers of grace and mercy.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 431.

How would you help someone who says, “I am just so weak in faith. I believe, but my faith wavers so much”? What practical steps can we take to make our faith stronger? How does what we read, think, and say impact our faith?

“We Are His Workmanship” (Eph. 2:10)

Paul stresses so clearly in Ephesians 2:8, 9 that we are not saved by works. Then, immediately, in verse 10, he says that we were not only “created in Christ Jesus unto good works” but that we were “before ordained” to walk in those good works. Is there a contradiction here? How do you understand what Paul is saying in these three verses?

Paul’s salvation story closes with the affirmation that “we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (*vs. 10, NIV*). We as individual Christians or as a community of faith owe our existence to God’s grace. We are His workmanship, His masterpiece, His work of art, created in Christ Jesus.

This ought not to be a matter of pride. Paul has warned against such boasting in verse 9: “Not of works, lest anyone should boast” (*NKJV*). Our works, however good and great and lasting they may be, cannot save us. In salvation, self-congratulation has no place. God expects only self-denial, self-death, in order that Christ may reign in our hearts as supreme—without any competitor. “Only the covering which Christ Himself has provided can make us meet to appear in God’s presence. . . . This robe, woven in the loom of heaven, has in it not one thread of human devising. Christ in His humanity wrought out a perfect character, and this character He offers to impart to us.”—Ellen G. White, *Maranatha*, p. 78.

Christians must guard against two fallacies. First, the idea that we need to add something of our own to God’s grace. Second, freedom in Christ frees us from obedience to His claims.

Yes, we are His workmanship. We are a new creation by His grace through faith. But we are new creatures in Christ “to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (*vs. 10, NIV*). Does this mean our works are a prerequisite to our salvation? Far from it. But they are a requisite of a saved life. Paul’s appeal is for a life and a lifestyle consistent with the demands of faith. In effect, the apostle is saying: “Yes, you are saved by faith. You are saved by the free grace of God. But you are saved to live. Your faith experience must move from believing to living. You must live out your salvation. That involves a lifestyle of obedience, just like our great model—Christ Jesus—who obeyed even to the point of humiliation and death (*Phil. 2:5-12*). And, furthermore, your Christian walk is your personal responsibility; no one else can do it for you.”

Further Study: *Righteousness by faith alone.* “Let the subject be made distinct and plain that it is not possible to effect anything in our standing before God or in the gift of God to us through creature merit. Should faith and works purchase the gift of salvation for anyone, then the Creator is under obligation to the creature. Here is an opportunity for falsehood to be accepted as truth. . . . If man cannot, by any of his good works, merit salvation, then it must be wholly of grace, received by man as a sinner because he receives and believes in Jesus. It is wholly a free gift. Justification by faith is placed beyond controversy.” —Ellen G. White, *Faith and Works*, pp. 19, 20.

On fruit-bearing. “Those who become new creatures in Christ Jesus will bring forth the fruits of the Spirit, ‘love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.’ Galatians 5:22, 23. They will no longer fashion themselves according to the former lusts, but by the faith of the Son of God they will follow in His steps, reflect His character, and purify themselves even as He is pure. The things they once hated they now love, and the things they once loved they hate. The proud and self-assertive become meek and lowly in heart. The vain and supercilious become serious and unobtrusive. The drunken become sober, and the profligate pure. The vain customs and fashions of the world are laid aside.” —Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 58.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Discuss the question asked at the end of Sunday’s study about friendship with the world and what that means.
- 2 As a class, discuss the two Ellen G. White quotes listed above. How do you harmonize the teachings presented there?
- 3 Talk about this idea of morals and values and ideas of right and wrong being only relative. Are there some ideas of right and wrong that are purely relative, subjective, and personal, or is everything absolute?
- 4 What can you do as a class to help everyone in your local church better understand the great truth of salvation by faith alone?

The Church That Would Not Burn

by ERIGA VICTOR

Southern Sudan has been a battleground for almost 40 years. Guerrilla soldiers repeatedly invade villages, burn homes, rape women, and terrorize the people. Families have been separated, and thousands have been killed.

In the village of Loa stands the first Adventist church built in southern Sudan. Members continued to worship there even after other villagers had fled. But the men of the congregation refused to join the army or to bear arms. Some soldiers thought that the Adventists refused to join their army because they supported the guerrilla troops from the north. Others were jealous that Adventists were not forced to join the army.

One day some soldiers decided to burn down the Adventist church, hoping to force the Adventists to join the military. At night they lit match after match and tossed them onto the dry thatched roof. But the roof would not catch fire. Finally one man said, "This is wrong, or we would have been able to burn this church down with one match." Others disagreed, and fighting broke out among the troublemakers.

Next the troops decided to force the Adventist men into the military. On Sabbath, they surrounded the church and waited for the service to end. When the congregation came outside, the soldiers rounded up the men and marched them to their camp amid shouts of triumph.

The Adventist men were taken to the base commander, who interviewed them one by one. The men each explained that they had been taken by force. The commander released all those who performed important community duties, such as teachers.

When the soldiers who had captured the Adventists saw that they were released, they threatened to go home too. The commander told them to think carefully about their actions. "We have been in several dangerous situations lately, but God has protected us. Perhaps it is because of the prayers of these Adventists that we have been saved. If you mistreat these people because of their faith, you may find yourself fighting against God. And remember, the day that these Adventists flee their village, God's protection may leave as well."

Three months later fighting in the area grew worse. When the Adventists started to leave, other villagers left as well, for they believed that the safest place to be was with God's people.

Pray that the fighting in Southern Sudan will end, and God's people will be able to return to their homes and farms.

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