

“We Are His Workmanship”

In our chapter for today, the Apostle describes matters of fundamental importance to the servants of the Lord:

“... for by grace are ye saved through faith: and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.” (Eph. 2:8-10).

There are a number of important points here: firstly, we are saved by Grace, and not of works. The significance of this can be seen in Romans chapter 4: “... therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed ...” (Rom. 4:16). If salvation were by works, then no man would be saved, for “all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). But the fact that it is by grace makes it “sure” and certain. For those who follow the ways of the spirit, their hope of salvation is indeed sure and certain, like an anchor “both sure and steadfast” (Heb. 6:19). And in his parable of the two ways, Jesus taught that for those who walk on the narrow way, their destination is guaranteed – it only leads to one destination, which is eternal life (Mat. 7:14).

However, in our verse cited above, works do have a place. Whilst salvation is a gift by grace, “we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus unto good works”. If we are men and women of faith, we need to demonstrate that faith in the things that we do, else our faith will be dead, being alone (see James – entire Epistle). But those works are themselves of God, “we are his workmanship”. God Himself has a purpose with the believers, being developed as a new creation (i.e. “created in Christ Jesus”). And ultimately, the faithful works of the believer are of Him, and part of the outworking of that Purpose.

Paul taught the Philippians that: “it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13). Notice that all things are of God: it is He that works within us causing us to both want to do His Will, and to actually perform it. But how is this accomplished? Not by some nebulous Holy Spirit infusion as some would have us believe, but by the indwelling of His Word of Truth:

“For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, **which effectually worketh also in you that believe**” (1 Thes. 2:13).

It is the Word of God which worketh “effectually” in the believer’s heart, enabling them to will and to do of His Good Pleasure. We must therefore give attendance to that Word, studying it diligently, that it may produce the works of God, lest we be found workmen that need to be ashamed (2 Tim. 2:15).

It is written that “the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he that is spiritual discerneth all things ...” (1 Cor. 2:14-15).

It logically follows then, that in order to receive spiritual things, we need to have a change of mindset. As it is also written: “be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed **by the renewing of your mind**, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God” (Rom. 12:2).

The process is described by Paul thus: “... so then, faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17). Notice that here, hearing itself comes from the word of God. “The hearing ear, and the seeing eye, Yahweh hath made even both of them” (Prov. 20:12). The more we study and attend to the Word of God, the more receptive we can become to Divine Principles. And by allowing the word of Christ to dwell in us richly (Col. 3:16), we can be part of a new Creation brought about by the expression of that Word.

BEGOTTEN BY THE WORD

Just as the Genesis creation came about by the sending forth of God’s word (i.e. “Let there be Light”), even so the New Creation is brought about by God sending the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ into the believer’s hearts (2 Cor 4:6). This brings about a spiritual rebirth:

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Pet. 1:3).

And again, the believers are:

“ ... born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever” (1 Pet. 1:23).

This is God’s “workmanship”. It is brought about by both His Providence, and the influence of His Word being sent forth, which brings forth children, born from above (Jno. 3:3): newborn babes committed to the doing of His Will. And as babies grow into adults, so the believers must grow and mature into members of the complete body of Christ:

“that we henceforth be **no more children**, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but speaking the Truth in love, may **grow up** into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ ...” (Eph. 4:14-15).

HIS WORKMANSHIP

The important point to note is that in every aspect of the system of Salvation ordained by God is arranged that man cannot glory in man. God is the first cause, the prime mover in all things: there is no scope for man to boast: all glory is to Him alone. Any good work that we can achieve is not of ourselves, but of God whose word dwells within us. Hence Paul wrote of “... him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own Will; that we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ” (Eph. 1:11-12). Again, he writes: “now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, Unto him be glory in the ecclesia by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end” (Eph. 3:20-21). And yet again, he describes

how “I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily” (Col. 1:29). All things are of God, and are ordained for His Glory and Honour.

The situation is not that we loved God, and that therefore He blesses us. Rather, it is that He loved us first, and brought us near by His Grace:

“herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another” (1 Jno. 4:10-11).

Again:

“we love him, because he first loved us” (1 Jno. 4:19).

He is the prime mover: “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself” (2 Cor. 5:19). Man cannot claim life by entitlement – he is utterly dependant upon the Grace of God: “... for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the Law. But the Scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to those that believe” (Gal. 3:21-22).

THE IMPORTANCE OF ISRAEL

Returning to today’s chapter (Ephesians 2), we find that the believers were once “strangers and foreigners” (vs19) but have now been brought nigh. Speaking of the brethren before they embraced the Gospel Truth, Paul writes:

“That at that time, ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of Promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ” (Eph. 2:12-13).

This emphasises the importance of Israel. For the believers it can be said that “Jerusalem” is “the mother of us all” (Gal. 4:26). To embrace the Gospel message is to embrace the Hope of Israel (Act 28:20), and become joined to “the commonwealth of Israel,” being “made nigh” by the blood of Christ.

Fundamentally, there is only one body. Speaking of Jew and Gentile, the apostle speaks of the mission of Christ “to make in himself of twain **one new man**, so making peace; and that he might reconcile both unto God in **one body** by the cross ...” (Eph. 2:15-16). Again, to the Romans, Paul describes that one body as being one olive tree (see Rom. 11). The Gentiles are taken out of a wild olive tree, and grafted into the Israelitish national tree – both become one: one Body, and one Tree.

There are many practical points that emerge from these things: being that the true believers comprise one body, there should be a unity between them. Hence in chapter 4, Paul admonishes them: “to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all” (Eph. 4:3-6). Notice the emphasis of unity here: The ecclesia of Christ must be of one mind and spirit, a single, not a split and divided body. Hence Christ is described as

being “the head over all things to the ecclesia, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all” (Eph. 1:22-23).

It is clear then, that in order to be partakers of the promises, we need to be joined as One to Israel. This also emerges many times in Scripture: to take one example, we have the prophecy of Isaiah:

“... but Israel shall be saved in Yahweh with an everlasting salvation: **ye shall not be ashamed nor confounded world without end**. For thus saith Yahweh that created the heavens; God himself that formed the earth and made it; he hath established it, he created it not in vain, he formed it to be inhabited: I am Yahweh; and there is none else” (Isa. 45:17-18).

Notice that the point here, is that whilst God will make a “full end” of all other nations (eg. Jer. 30:11, Psa. 10:16 etc.) Israel will continue as the “world without end”. Indeed, this phrase is picked up by Paul in our chapter, as we have already quoted:

“unto him be glory in the ecclesia by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, **world without end**” (Eph. 3:21).

It logically follows then, that if we wish to be saved “with an everlasting salvation”, “world without end”, then we must become joined to Israel’s national hope - and indeed, that is one of the major themes of Paul’s epistle to the Ephesians. This is the utmost and earnest desire of all the faithful: to attain to the Kingdom of God, being part of that unending world.

The main substance of our considerations today is summarised in the words of Messiah to Nicodemus:

“Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (Jno. 3:5).

There is a need to submit ourselves through the waters of Baptism, and to trust in the power of our God to save. We are thus born as members of the New Creation which Yahweh is developing from those who give ear to His Word. And we look forward to when we might inherit the kingdom prepared from the foundation of the world for those who believe and embrace the promises. Truly that will be when the true ecclesia will glorify Him “world without end”, living and glorying in Him throughout the Ages to Come.

Christopher Maddocks