

"God's Workmanship" (Eph. 2:8-10)

8-10

⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith -- and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – ⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰ For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Those who believe in Jesus, and live in His grace will start acting differently as God's workmanship. Don't misunderstand me. It is not that we do good works to receive grace. On the contrary, the good works are the gift from God, something God has given us who live in His grace.

1. To boast about the cross

This first thing we do as God's workmanship is to boast about the cross.

We are not saved by our works, so there is no work we can boast about before God. Only by God's grace, through faith, we were saved, given new life, and created in Christ. A person who used to ignore God, who couldn't recognize sins, will boast about the cross. A person who used to hate church and Jesus will boast about the cross.

Apostle Paul was exactly like that.

"For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. ¹⁰ But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them--yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me" (1 Cor. 15:9-10).

He had many good things in his life. He was born in a good family. He was bright, very good at study. He was blameless in his behavior. He had so many things to boast about. But after he encountered Jesus, he started to think all these nothing to boast about, or rather he considered these like rubbish (Phi. 3:3-9). Instead, he boasted about Jesus, about his gospel. There was nothing for him to boast about except the cross (Gal. 6:14). So he said:

"Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent

man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. ¹⁴ The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst" (1 Tim. 1:13-15).

Think about it. We were heading straight for destruction, dead in sins, but God saved us and made us alive! That is only by the cross of Christ, by God's grace. If we don't boast about it, what else can we boast? As God's workmanship we boast about the cross.

2. To boast about our weaknesses

Those who believe in Jesus, and live in His grace act differently as God's workmanship. The second thing we do is to boast about our weaknesses (2 Cor. 11:30; 12:9).

Usually people hide their weaknesses. They will cover their weaknesses so that others think them doing well. They would put a mask and pretend as if they had no weaknesses at all. Sometimes they may use their weaknesses as their strength to manipulate others, but they are negative about their weaknesses.

But people who believe in Jesus and live in God's grace behave differently. They boast about their weaknesses. Why? It is because God's power is made perfect in weakness. "Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me" (2 Cor. 12:9).

Only when we honestly admit that we have weaknesses, we will truly come to understand God's love and His grace. We will fully recognize or taste how wonderful it is to live in grace. "But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us" (2 Cor. 4:7).

We will come to feel the fact, not just as a head knowledge, that God loves, forgives and accepts us who have weaknesses, who are full of shortcomings, as we are. Then, we can finally realize what grace is. Then, we can finally truly accept ourselves who have weaknesses as we are.

3. To fight against destruction

The third thing we do as God's workmanship is to fight against destruction. We were given the will to fight against the power that brings destruction, such as desire to gratify our sinful nature, the way of the world and lies of Satan.

"While the Holy Spirit gives us the power to live new lives, the old life keeps calling to us every day, and we must continually deal with the ongoing psychological, emotional, and social effects of our sin-trainted upbringing and the world in which we live."¹

"By God's grace and Spirit, we taste the divine nature in this life and experience a measure of transformation, yet we are continually hindered by our limited, dying, and decaying bodies, which affect our thinking, feeling, and ability to relate to others."²

So, then, what are the differences before and after we are born again?

Before, we chose to follow the way of the world, and gratify the desires of our sinful nature, or otherwise we did so unintentionally (Eph. 2:1-3). But when we are born again, when we are made new, we start to feel bad about our sins, and seek God's will and seek to live according to God's will (see Heb. 8:10; Rom. 8:4).

We chose to change our ways, because we knew if we continue to follow the way of the world and gratify our sinful desires, we are heading straight for destruction. And it's the Holy Spirit who makes us recognize it, and who empowers us live in the light.

Rom. 6:10-14

The death he [Christ Jesus] died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. ¹¹ In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. ¹² Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. ¹³ Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. ¹⁴ For sin shall not be your master, because you

¹ Timothy C. Geoffrion, *One Step at a Time*, The Alban Institute, 2008 (p.162)

² Ibid., (p.164)

are not under law, but under grace.

Do you know that God never ever ignore our sins? He never ever pretends NOT to see our sins. He can't just forget about our sins. The cost of sin must be paid, then he can forgive. In order to set us free from the bondage of sin and the cost of sin, Jesus died on the cross. We were saved by grace through faith in Jesus.

When we truly understand this and know that we are saved from this destruction by God's grace, how can we want to go back to our old ways of life again? God gave us the new direction of life. God made us new.

4. To love Jesus

The good works we do as God's workmanship. The forth of them is that we love Jesus.

Before, I didn't really care about God. I only prayed to God before exam or when I faced difficulties. But "danger past, God forgotten." I used to think church is the place for people with time to kill. But when I believed in Jesus and started to live in His grace, I started to love Jesus.

Luke 7:36-47

Now one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, so he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table.³⁷ When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume,³⁸ and as she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.³⁹ When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is--that she is a sinner."⁴⁰ Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to tell you." "Tell me, teacher," he said.⁴¹ "Two men owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty."⁴² Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he canceled the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?"⁴³ Simon replied, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt canceled." "You have judged correctly," Jesus said.⁴⁴ Then he turned toward the woman

and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. ⁴⁵ You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. ⁴⁶ You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. ⁴⁷ Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven--for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little.

Her action showed that she understood her many sins had been forgiven by Jesus. She knew how terrible her life was and how big Jesus' grace was. So she can't stop loving Jesus. She can't limit how she loves Jesus.

Jesus loved us at the risk of his life. He searched us, who was broken and worn out, who, sometimes we thought, was failure, useless. And He picked us up, and transformed us. He gave us new life. So what's new? We are looking forward to spending time with this Jesus. We listen for His word, seek His face as if we were gathering gems, precious stones that were scattered.

5. To receive love to love others

Fifthly we are given love to love others.

We couldn't even love ourselves before. Have you ever thought, "I wish I was like this or like that"? Have you ever blamed yourselves, "Oh I should have done this, why have I done that?" It was impossible for us to love others when we couldn't even love ourselves!

When we believed in Jesus, we started to live in His grace. We started to understand we are loved by Jesus. The love of Jesus has sunk deeper and deeper into our heart, which used to be dried-up and hard. When we come to know the joy of being loved, we start to love not only Jesus also others. Love never finds satisfaction in just being loved alone. Love finds true satisfaction only in loving others.

Love comes from God (1 John 4:7). We didn't have true love in ourselves. When we believed in Jesus and started to live in His grace, the love of Jesus began to move in us. And His love spreads in us and flows through us.

This is how we relate to each other:

"I am to see him [Jesus] loving you and join him in his loving you. ... Our

relationship is always with each other in and with Trinity. I am to love you by joining the Trinity loving you. You are to love me by joining the Trinity loving me."³

I found in my old notes the following. I want to share with you. This is the letter written by one prisoner to his mother, when he was dying. He entrusted this letter to another prisoner. But the letter was not delivered to his mother until this prisoner was released. So when his mother received the letter, three years had passed since he passed away.

"Dear Mom. I haven't been a very good son. Please forgive me that I have put you and my family to shame. I won't live long any longer. You brought me up and reared me with love, hoping me to be a fine young man. But what have I done?

At the age of 18, I was sentenced to life imprisonment, because I had written antigovernment slogan on the wall. You didn't brought me up to be like this. I am very sorry. I am 31 years old now. (He'd been in prison for about 12 years then.) I don't think I can live till I am 33 years old. I am suffering from colon cancer. But in prison, they will not pay for my operation.

Instead of working in a coal mine, now I am working at a small storehouse which is full of rusty tins and tools. All day long I feel nauseous, so nobody wants to come close to me. All I can do is to watch the movement of the sand in the desert nearby. At one period, I didn't see any sun light for about 8 years. We move through the tunnel inside the coal mine. The room, corridor, and ventilation opening were the all the world to me.

Now my world is extending, but that is coming to the end soon. I have no hope. Sitting on the round chair, I cried for many hours, thinking about things I couldn't do, and cannot do any longer. I've even never had my own tooth brush here. Well, anyway, I've never expressed by word how much I thank you, and how I feel so sorry to make you sad.

Lately I started to think this life is not the only world. I cannot believe that I was born to live a life like this, only to die. There must be another world somewhere. There I can sit where I want to be, and there must be a table where I can eat nice food as much as I want. And I can freely make friends, talk to one another without any fear. I will not be returned at the signal of the passage of 30 minutes.

³ Darrell W. Johnson, *Experiencing The Trinity*, Regent College Publishing, 2002, p.68

I think there must be someone there. Someone who is here right now will be there at the chief seat of the table. One prisoner shared with me about the one who said, "My yoke is easy and my burden is light." I don't understand the meaning very well. But I can say when I heard this word, I felt peace in my heart and thought the death is not the end of my life, and my life was not meaningless.

What I want to leave with you is; I want you to find the one who said this word, Mom. If you find him, then we can eat at the same table again.

From your deceased son."

We know the one who said, "My yoke is easy, and my burden is light." It's Jesus. Jesus is calling people who are weary and burdened, "Come to me and take my yoke and you will have rest (Matt. 11:28-30)."

"My yoke. Something he [Jesus] himself wears. ... He wore it during the days of his flesh on earth. He wears it even now. So his yoke is his relationship with his Father; relationship of affection and trust and intimacy. And wonder of wonders – he calls us to enter into that relationship with him."⁴

We are made alive by God's grace. He gave us new life. Now we have a relationship with God of Trinity. He will continue to build us up into a person who shows God's grace to others, because God also loves them dearly.

God is transforming us as his workmanship. He is leading us, helping us, strengthening us to do these good works. The work is on the progress. We are on the process of being more like him.

Today we studied about "God's workmanship".

The power that leads us to destruction is working in the world where we live. This also affects Christians who believed in Jesus. It is God's grace that gives us victory against it. God chose us and led us into his grace, regardless of our weaknesses or shortcomings. Well He actually did that all the more for our weaknesses and shortcomings. When we accepted this fact by faith, his transformation work started in our lives. As His workmanship, we will continue to be transformed. The power of God and the glory of God will be shown through us, and the name of the Lord will be praised.

For personal reflection

⁴ Ibid., pp.66-67

- 1) How does understanding grace help you not to go back to the old life, and to fight against destruction?
- 2) Have you seen God's power revealed through/in your weaknesses before? How did it happen? What was your feeling in that time? What can you learn from it?
- 3) Read Luke 7:36-47. Think about the feelings and thoughts of the woman: (1) when she decided to do it, (2) while she was doing it, and (3) while she was listening to the conversation between Jesus and Peter.
- 4) The message suggested five good works. Which work among them do you want to make more active in your life? Why? What will you do for that? What help do you need? Whom will you ask for the help?