

Ephesians 2:10

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- [0 : 00] On the first Lord's Day of 2018, it's natural to think and to ask what this new year will hold in store for us.
- I'm sure there will be times of joy and times of sadness. There will be times of good health, there will be times of bad health.
- Times when relationships with those who are closest to us are strong, sometimes perhaps when they'll be strained. There will be times of opportunities and setbacks as well.
- And what I wanted to do this morning, wanted to share with you, are some thoughts from the final verse in the passage that we read together, in verse 10.
- And to use that as a way to set the context against which we'll face all of these things in 2018. Now, of course, there are many passages that we could have taken and could have used in a similar way to set that context, to set that perspective.
- [1 : 26] But I found, as I was thinking about what was on my heart to share, I found verse 10 particularly helpful. And so I wanted to share some thoughts with you on it.
- For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.
- Now, there's perhaps nothing particularly new or difficult that requires a theological understanding of what's being said. In many ways, it's pretty straightforward.
- And when we've been in church for many years, we've heard lots of sermons. Perhaps it's not new things that we're coming to learn, but to be reminded of truths that we already know.
- And to think about the difference that that truth makes in our day-to-day lives when we come across different circumstances, how we will respond to them. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.
- [2 : 44] So if we break that down into its component parts and start with this phrase, for we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus.
- Now, the scriptures use different words to describe what it means to be in Christ, different words to describe what God has done for us.
- In chapter 1, Paul refers to the believers as saints. In other words, those who have been set apart to God, those who are wholly devoted to God.
- And he refers to them as having been adopted, which obviously speaks about the family relationship, God as our heavenly Father and us as his children.
- And he speaks about the redemption that we have, thinking back to this idea of slavery and there's the great Old Testament example of people being brought out of slavery in Egypt.
- [3 : 43] But here in verse 10, Paul describes us in a different way, thinking about our hearts and our minds.

And he says that we are God's workmanship and that we have been created in Christ Jesus. Not obviously in a physical sense, but in a spiritual sense. Because God has changed our thinking and he's changed our desires.

And he's made us different people to people we otherwise would be if God had not worked in our hearts and in our minds. I remember when my older two were studying biology.

I did physics and chemistry at school, so I hadn't done any biology. I was trying to help them with it. I got the biology textbooks out and I started to read about trying to understand so I could help them.

I started reading the complexity in a single cell. Now this is third year biology, so this is just about as basic as it gets. And the complexity that was going on and the chemical reactions that were going on in the body.

[4 : 58] And I was just amazed by this. And I thought, well, why is it that I sort of read all of this and I look at the engineering design that's gone into our bodies and the construction and think, you know, this just points to a creator.

This just evidences God. And yet there'll be other people who will look at that and just see in a random collection of molecules that just come together by accident.

Why is it when we hear about Jesus, we confess him as our Lord and as the Son of God and we accept the claims that Jesus made about himself.

And in our desires, we desire to live a life which is reflective of God's character and we seek his honour.

And the reason that we have these perspectives and we think like that and we have these desires is because God has worked in our hearts. Because we are God's workmanship.

[6 : 07] God has changed the way we think, the way that we feel, compared to what we would otherwise have done. This is a pretty fundamental change. In the earlier part of the passage that we read together, it starts by talking about people being dead.

Verse 1, as for you, you were dead. And then verse 4, but because of his great love for us, God made us alive with Christ. So in the sense that before you hear spiritual truth, it has no impact upon you even as speaking to someone who is dead, it has no impact.

And yet now, because God has worked in our hearts, we respond to that spiritual truth. There is spiritual life now, but as before, there was not. Of course, this is something that's reflected in other passages in the Scriptures as well.

Lord Jesus himself talked about us being born again. In other words, the difference between that God's work in our lives has made is so radical and so fundamental, it's described as being an entirely new life.

Now, it's radical and fundamental such that it can be described as a new creation. But in this life, it's imperfect, isn't it? It's incomplete. And often, we don't feel like the new creation.

[7 : 38] We don't feel that quite as we would expect. And we have to remind ourselves of the Gospel.

In verses 8 and 9 of this passage, Paul writes, For it is by grace you have been saved through faith. And this, not from yourselves, it is a gift of God.

Not by works, so that no one can boast. And sometimes in our discouragements and in our failures, to live up to being all that God has called us to be, it's important to come back to the fundamental truths that we know.

The fundamental truths even set out in this verse 8. But somehow, it's not that we have come to faith. We've come to Christ by getting up to a particular standard.

And I came to faith when I was 19. I hadn't come out of a Christian background at all. I'd just come along to church. My wife, the girl I was seeing at the time, my wife had brought me to church.

[8 : 58] I was trying to understand what was being said. And I'd come to the conviction that what the Scriptures said had been true. And I'd come to the conviction that, you know, since Christ is Lord, I wanted to follow Him.

But for a long time, I thought, you know, I had to get up to a particular standard before I could confess Christ publicly. And it was only as I started to understand more that I realized that actually that's not what the Scriptures are saying at all.

You come by faith and not by works. A belief in who God is and a desire to honor Him in the way that we should live.

And so, referring back to a passage in Corinthians, where Paul reminds us, if anyone is in Christ, in other words, if anyone has come to faith, he genuinely desires to follow the Lord.

If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old is gone and the new has come. So, whatever 2018 has been in store for us, we can come back to this passage and be encouraged.

[10 : 16] Encouraged because God has involved Himself in our lives. Encouraged because God has not only involved Himself in our lives in the past, but continues to do so.

There's a passage in John 14 that I found very helpful over the years. John chapter 14.

And here, it's part of this series of passages that the Lord is starting to prepare the disciples for His death.

It starts with the Lord washing the disciples' feet and continues on until Gethsemane.

And the Lord is starting to explain to them what is going to happen. Now, Jesus had lived among them, among the disciples.

[11 : 17] He shared everyday life with them for perhaps three years or so. He'd been their example. He'd guided them.

He'd helped them, living alongside them. There were instances in the Scriptures where He corrected them and encouraged them. And right on the edge of, or right at the point where He's about to be arrested and to go to the cross, and there obviously, the disciples are unsure as to what will happen and quite apprehensive as to what will happen when Jesus leaves.

And the Lord says to them in John chapter 14, verse 6, I will ask the Father, and He will give you another counselor to be with you.

Another counselor. Now, the word that's used there is paraclete. You used to see that in hymns and wonder, you know, what it meant.

And the paraclete was someone who came alongside to help. It's made up of two words, para, alongside, and coletto, meaning to call, paraclete. And the Lord, and so for example, maybe familiar with the word ecclesiastical, referring to the church, referring to those who've been called out.

[12 : 44] It's the same derivation, same word. So the word that certainly in the NIV is translated counselor, someone who comes alongside to help, someone who comes alongside to guide, to help, to correct, to strengthen, to encourage.

And this was going to be another paraclete, in other words, another one to help them when Jesus had left. And then just later on in the passage in John chapter 14, the paraclete, the counselor, the helper, is identified as the Holy Spirit, and called the Spirit of Truth.

And Jesus starts to explain to them that the Spirit has been with them, but in the future He will be in them, talking about just the closeness closeness of the work of the Spirit in the lives of the believers.

And just as the Holy Spirit came to indwell the early disciples, so if He indwells the Christian to guide and to strengthen and encourage.

So just as God has done a work in our hearts, so God continues to do a work in our hearts. Now we have, obviously, a responsibility too, to expose our minds to God's truth, to stir one another up to love and to good deeds, to encourage one another.

[14 : 16] But it's also true, and something we come back to even in the point of our discouragements, what Paul says in Philippians, for it is God who works in us to do what?

To will and to act according to His good pleasure. So there may be times in 2018 where you don't feel like God's workmanship, where you don't feel like that you're a new creation.

There might be times when you believe, but there's a doubt. There might be times when you desire to live for God, but struggle to do so.

I can encourage you to go back to this passage in Ephesians and to the previous passage in chapter 1 and to consider again the resources that God has made available to us to live in the way in which He has called us to live.

There's a remarkable verse in verse 19 of chapter 1 where Paul refers to God's incomparably great power.

[15 : 31] But he doesn't just refer to His incomparably great power. He says that it's God's incomparably great power for us, for us, to make us all that God has caused us to be.

And what power is that? Paul says, well, this is the same power that raised Christ from the dead. That power is like the working of His mighty strength which He exerted in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly realms.

This is the power, this is the extent of the power that God has, works in our hearts. In some ways, that's beyond something that we can really imagine the extent of that.

And so when we come to chapter 3, He reminds us again that the Father is able to do immeasurably more than all we can ask or imagine according to His power that is at work within us.

So when we're discouraged, you can look back and see God has worked in our hearts to change the way that we think and desire and continues to do so.

[16 : 54] And to remind ourselves as well when we're struggling, that in a sense, God is honored as we struggle.

God is honored in the way in which we cling on to Him in the midst of the difficulties, in the midst of the struggles. And so I think there's a challenge for us in this, to take these passages and say, you know, to what extent, as I go through my life and through the joys and the sadness, through the different relationships when they're good or maybe when they're strained, when I have the opportunities or the difficulties, am I coming back to some of these truths, coming back to a biblical worldview, a biblical way of thinking about our lives, as being God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus.

And perhaps a challenge for us, too, when we think about sharing our faith, because we often become discouraged in that. We often think, well, if I share my faith, if I say something, will it have any effect?

Will it have, you know, will I know quite how to put it? And sometimes when we do that, we don't go back to actually how we came to faith ourselves.

And back to passages such as this, they're saying, well, actually, the ability of someone to understand and to receive and for their minds to be changed and their hearts to be changed is fundamentally God's work.

[18 : 32] And so if we want to share our faith, there's an encouragement there that it's not down to us, but down to the Lord's work, and maybe an encouragement to start taking friends and loved ones to the Lord in prayer that we might ask Him to do His work, even as He has done that work in our own hearts.

So the question of who am I, the question of identity, I'm God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus. But for what purpose?

Why am I here? What is my purpose in 2018? Well, we see that also in this verse 10, because we are God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus to do good works, to do good works.

Now, the rest of Ephesians really fills that out, the very specific applications of what it means to do good works. But my point in sharing that with you isn't so much to go into the detail of what Paul lays out as examples of that, but to encourage you to have the perspective as you go through 2018 of thinking, the reason I am here, the reason God has worked in my heart is that I might do good works.

Chapter 4, verse 22. We are called to put off your old self, to be made new in the attitudes of your mind, and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

[20 : 24] So, if we're saying, what is the good works that God has called us to do? Well, if you pick that up and take it right up to a high level, it's to be like God. God, it's in our hearts, first of all, to reflect His character, that our actions might be the overflowing of that heart, the practical outworking of our heart, that in our characters we might be like God, so that in our actions we might be like God also.

Well, in chapter 1, there's also a statement about our purpose and our reason in verse 11. In chapter 1, verse 11 and verse 12, it refers to us God having worked in our hearts or having been chosen in order that we might be for the praise of His glory.

So, in chapter 1, you've got the statement that we're created in Christ Jesus that we might be to the praise of His glory. In chapter 2, we have the answer that we've been created in Christ Jesus that we might do good works.

Of course, those two things aren't entirely different and separate things, are they? Because we can praise God verbally, we can praise God in song, but perhaps the way that we most fully praise God is to live lives which are reflective of His own character.

and He might be praised in that way. So, that we might, as chapter 5, verse 1 says, we might be imitators of God in the way in which we live.

[22 : 12] But it's not just that we've been called or created in Christ Jesus to do good works. We're created in Christ Jesus to do specifically good works which God prepared in advance for us to do.

There are specific things that the Lord would have you do in 2018. And there are specific things that the Lord would have you do in 2018 which He prepared in advance before 2018.

Considerably before 2018. specific people that He would have you encourage. Specific people that He would have you pray for.

There are specific tasks that He would have you do in the church or at home or at work. Specific things that He's called you to do.

Do you? It's a very personal thing. Not necessarily called someone else to do those things but called you to do them.

[23 : 30] Because it's specifically good works which God prepared in advance for you to do not necessarily for someone else to do. And so the question arises well how do I know what it is that the Lord would have me do?

Well there are some things which the scriptures expressly set out that we would give thanks in the name of the Lord Jesus because that's God's will for us and there are various passages that specifically tell us what God's will for us is.

There are some things which are just the natural overflow of the life of faith of our hearts. But over and against those things it seems to me that if we genuinely seek to walk faithfully before God God will place into our hearts and give us the desire to do the things that He would have us do.

So if you feel a prompting in your heart to do something and the scriptures it's not something that the scriptures have called you away from I think I encourage you to think seriously about doing whatever it is that the Lord has laid on your heart to do and to see in that perhaps the prompting that obviously requires some wisdom and it might require the counsel of others.

But we must start with the premise that the Lord has called us to do specific things and to seek out that calling and to take the value of the things that He has called us to do not from how the world might see it or how other people might see it or whether the thing is public or private seen by many or seen by few or none not by whether it's difficult to do but to take the value of the things that He has called us to do in the identity of the person who has asked you to do it in other words the value of the things that He has called us to do comes not from the thing itself but from God from the person who has asked you to do it when you think about it in this way you see the absolute importance of every believer because no one has the relationships that you have no one goes to the places that you do has the things on your heart that you have have the mix of experiences that you have there are specific things that the Lord would have you do you see the importance of every person people that you would speak to that we might stir one another up that we might be mutually encouraged by each other's faith and I think it takes us too into this question of balance because if the Lord has given us different relationships different aspects to our lives it might be as a husband or a wife a father or a child a brother or sister a grandson or a grandparent he's given us aspects of our lives to do with work or study every circumstance in our lives are things which the

[27 : 13] Lord has brought into our lives and therefore the call to do good works which he has prepared in advance for us to do has to be seen throughout all of those things and so we need the wisdom of God that we don't overemphasize one aspect to the neglect and detriment of others wisdom to know how to allocate our time wisdom to know what to focus on perhaps a degree of planning practical things like that that there will be time to do not just some of the things that God has called us to do but all of the things which the Lord would have us do we are God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus to do good works specifically good works which God has called us to do and then finally this phrase for us to do certainly in the

NIV that doesn't say any more more than that if you use an ESV you'll see this phrase about good works which the Lord has that we might walk in them and if you go back to the to the to the Greek that's much that's much closer to the phrase literally that we should walk in these good works and so the emphasis there is not so much there's a job here and there's a work there and there's another work over here as individual component parts but the idea is much more that these things should characterize every aspect of our lives the word that's translated for us to do in the NIV and for us to walk in ESV is also used in Galatians chapter 5 and this is just to illustrate the comprehensive nature of this the world view as it were in

Galatians chapter 5 verse 16 the word is translated live where it says so I say live by the spirit and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature so it's just this kind of comprehensive idea of the way in which we should live well there's a challenge there for us to see all of life in this way a challenge to work out the practical realities of God having worked in our hearts and our minds to give us different thoughts and different perspectives different desires to use the resources God has provided to us that we might stir up these things in our own hearts and to approach 2018 accordingly let's pray our father we do thank you for these truths things and we pray lord that when we get into different situations perhaps situations that we may not be we're not sure about what to do we pray lord that we wouldn't be ones who try and figure out the response in our own thinking but lord we would continually go back to your word and see in it your guidance and your direction and we pray that the spirit the holy spirit who you've given to us to come alongside to help us might take your word and prompt us and direct us in the way in which we should go revealing to us the good works that you have prepared in advance for us to do we pray lord that you would help us to honour you in Jesus name amen