

# God's workmanship (Quality: Average)

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Preacher: Delves, Stanley (1897-1978)

[ 0 : 00 ] With the Lord's help and blessing, I will ask your attention to his word in the epistles of Paul to the Ephesians, the second chapter, the tenth verse.

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

The second chapter of the epistle to the Ephesians, the tenth verse. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

There is what has often been called a balance in the truth.

That is to say, there are many aspects and parts of the truth as we have it set before us in the scriptures.

[ 1 : 31 ] And each part of truth relates essentially to every other part of truth. And there are truths in the doctrine of it especially, that are of more importance to us to know and believe and experience than others.

Because they essentially relate to the salvation of our souls. And those truths that do essentially relate to the salvation of our souls are the most important truths for us to understand and to believe and to experience for ourselves.

But every part of truth is important. There is nothing revealed in the word of God that we can write off as being of no importance to us or of no profit to us as far as we are able and given to understand it.

And this is what is meant by the balance of truth. For if one truth or one aspect of truth is exclusively emphasized and another aspect of truth is proportionably neglected, then you don't get what is a real presentation of the truth at all.

It's more a caricature than a presentation. It's more apt to mislead than to guide. And if an imperfect or an unbalanced view of the truth is received into the heart, it will produce an unbalanced spiritual character.

[ 3 : 38 ] It's bound to. Now, there is, as I say, there is a perfect balance of truth in the scriptures.

That which is most essential, you will find, is most frequently set forth. It's not only every aspect of truth in the scripture, but it is in the scripture in a due proportion of emphasis.

Now, there should be something of this balance of truth in the preaching.

This is important. And perhaps there is something of a fault in this, that ministers are very apt to bear, perhaps almost exclusively, upon certain aspects of truth, perhaps because they are more led that way, or it may be because they feel that those particular aspects of truth are more profitable to set forth.

And so there's a danger of an unbalanced presentation of truth. Some are more experimental, and that is essential.

[ 5 : 08 ] Some are more doctrinal. Some are more practical. But then there should be each of these features of truth in a ministry, to make it a complete ministry.

I have thought, what a word that was the apostle could say, when he bade farewell to the elders of the Church of God at Ephesus.

It was at Miletus, of course. I mean the elders of the Church, of this very Church, of the Ephesians. He could say, I have not shunned to declare unto you the whole counsel of God.

All of it. I haven't got anything back. I haven't tried to please. I haven't offended intentionally.

I've preached the whole counsel of God to you. So that he could very well say, I'm clear from the blood of all men.

[ 6 : 12 ] And what about the hearer's point of view? For there may be a partiality in the hearers, as well as a lack of comprehensiveness in the ministry.

Do you, my friends, want to hear it all? Have you got some favorite line you like to hear preach? And if you perceive a minister, isn't going that way, you feel a lack of interest.

You think, oh, that's not going to be very profitable today. Well, now, that's not good either. That's not good. You may as much need to hear and receive lines of truth that do not so much appeal to you as you do those that do appeal to you.

Perhaps more so because those lines of truth that do not so much appeal to you may be just those things that are lacking in your particular spiritual life and experience and practice.

Well, now, you'll say, what's the prompt of you to commence like this this morning? Well, this. Because the apostle in this chapter gives us a perfect balance between two truths.

[ 7 : 48 ] One is this, that salvation is all an entirety of grace and that works of any sort have just nothing at all to do with it.

If ever there was an able and faithful exponent of this essential doctrine of the gospel that it's by gracious aid through faith that is through believing and even believing is something that God must first of all give you faith to do that it's all of God entirely and that good works have just nothing to do with your salvation.

It's entirely and only God's free and sovereign and all sufficient grace. the apostle was exceedingly clear about that.

Peter says of Paul's writings that there were in them some things hard to be understood which he said those that are unlearned and unstable rest that is tear out of their connection and misapply them and no doubt there are some things in the apostle's writings that are hard to be understood but this doctrine isn't hard to be understood that by gracious aid through believing there's nothing perplexing about that.

Anyone if they have any spiritual understanding at all can understand what the apostle meant in verse 8 for by gracious aid they can understand that it was all of God's free and sovereign and unmerited grace from beginning to end and the apostle further guards that doctrine for it needs to be guarded because it is so essential by verse 9 not of works lest any man should boast he won't let works of any sort have any place whatever in the salvation of the soul well now suppose he left it at that we should really have had a very unbalanced view given to us of this truth and the inference might have been drawn from it well then works have got nothing to do with the religion of Jesus

[ 10 : 43 ] Christ they all belong to the old legal dispensation there's no place for good works in godliness it's all of grace and there's no encouragement to anyone to seek to glorify God by doing that which is good and right in his side banish good works altogether they might say there's no place for them oh no says the apostle no he immediately balances the truth of verses 8 and 9 by verse 10 for he says so far from good works having nothing to do with the matter why he said we're his workmanship created in Christ Jesus unto good works for that very end and purpose or at least that is one end and purpose of God's workmanship in new creating the soul that there should be a bringing forth of good works and this is not at all a haphazard into dental matter for God hath before ordained that we should walk in them see how he balances one truth with another now if he'd merely said we are his workmanship created in

Jesus Christ to good works we might suppose that's the way to be saved no says the apostle no if he'd said you're saved by grace not of works we might have said well then works have no place in the religion of Jesus Christ yes I have says Paul yes I have well now as the Lord may help me then I want to bear upon this point this morning but to make it as clear as I possibly can and one cannot make matters of touch solemn importance too clear I would just ask your attention for a minute to two to verse nine not of works lest any man should boast this is very important for to set anyone to good works to make things better between them and God is to set them all together in the wrong track salvation not of works salvation is not of works not of the best works that anyone can do and I was thinking pondering over these matters what a good thing it is that it is so that it's not of works now you suppose for a moment that salvation salvation in any sense depended upon man's works now tell me then how many good works must a man do to be saved who can put the measure to it who could say well now you haven't done enough good works yet you must do more and who could say when we have done enough good works to be saved he will put the hurt and him down if it was of works how many works and what kind of works and have we done enough works and take such a doctrine as this for instance to a man on his death date and say well if he was in concern of soul tell him that he must do some good works he say good works well I shall soon be dead

I can't do any good works but direct his eye and his mind to Jesus Christ and say to him believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved that's a message to take to a man even at the last hour of his life we have a good reason to be thankful that salvation is not of worth and another thing how could salvation be of works when you consider that sin is mixed with all our works in some way or other for it is you know especially with regard to a man in an unsaved condition what can he do whatever he does the sinfulness of his nature defiles it how can a man be saved by works that have got sin in them themselves it's like a man sinking into the mire and every step which he struggles to get out of it only sinks him deeper into and even after salvation has come by faith still we couldn't admit works into salvation at all because even now we must confess it that our best is stained and died with sin our all is nothing worth now my friend you couldn't feel could you the least comfort in your spirit from anything you've ever done compare with what you can feel from what the Lord

Jesus Christ has done for you brethren which gives you most comfort Christ's perfect righteousness imputed to you by God or some good work that you feel you may have done it is not of work because if it was man could have some honour in his own salvation now in salvation the Lord is exceedingly careful of his own honour and his glory there's nothing in man that is more abhorrent to God than his pride that man should boast is exceedingly provoking to the most high God everyone that is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord everyone and of all pride nothing is more abominable in the sight of God than religious pride than man should boast of his good work now

God so ordered it and appointed it that in the great matter of salvation all the honour all the praise and all the glory should be his alone and therefore it is expressly said it is not of work that any man should boast for if it was in any sense of works then man might boast but the greatest reason why salvation can never be of works at all is because that would dishonour the perfect work and perfect sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ if salvation was of work Jesus Christ need never have shed his precious blood never wrought out his perfect obedience for us never gone to

[ 18 : 56 ] Calvary to suffer bleed and die to save our poor souls if good works could do it well now that is enough on that point this morning not of works lest any man should boast but my text is thus for we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus unto good works which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them now if my discourse follows the line of my meditation I will expound my text along these lines now first of all there is the divine worker we are his his workmanship there's the divine worker then secondly there's the divine work we are his workmanship and this divine work is a creation in

Jesus Christ we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus and then there is thirdly the purpose of his work in this particular it is that we should walk in good works created in Christ Jesus unto good works which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them so you have first the worker and secondly the work or workmanship and then thirdly the effect of it now if you have a concern about yourselves you will listen attentively to me in this matter because believe me all true real genuine religion is the work of

God in your soul and if there's no work of God in your soul you're out of the secret yet that doesn't follow you always will be for God may yet work in you work of God in your soul your religion has got no substance no foundation no real genuine character for all true religion is the work of God in the soul first and all outward practice and obedience and the like is the effect of God's work so that to know whether we are the subject of God's divine work is of the greatest importance for if you neglect that you may go sadly wrong and be greatly deceived we are his workmanship but I must speak first about the divine worker now this is quite a proper expression that I should speak of

God as a worker for the Lord Jesus Christ used that expression when he said my father worketh hitherto and I were for if there's a work there's a worker our superintendent mentioned a matter to me this morning in a few words struck me as being somewhat remarkable because of a subject that I had on my mind which he did not know and it gave me this consideration that there are two ways in which God works first of all he works upon us and in us to make us his workmanship then he works with us and he works by us and when he works with us or by us then we bring forth those good works which are to his honour and his glory you see

God works two ways he works in us first and then he works by us afterwards according to that word in Matthew that they went everywhere preaching the word the Lord working with them and confirming the word with signs following that Mark he worked in them first and then he worked with them afterwards now consider this for a few moments the divine worker now what a great thing it is really if you consider it calmly and thoughtfully what a great thing it is for God to work in us and on our hearts and he does you know he does we're his workmanship and there are three things with regard to the divine worker in this matter

[ 24 : 52 ] I want just briefly to mention now first of all there's always God's purpose God never works without a purpose there's never anything haphazard uncertain or not planned where God works behind God's work there's God's purpose God's purpose as it is in his eternal mind and will no one can read we don't know we don't know what God's purpose is until he begins to work when he begins to work then we can say ah now we can see his purpose for instance there's anyone here this morning who up till now is really unconcerned and indifferent and careless about these eternal things of truth and about the salvation of the soul now I don't know what God's purpose to you may be

I don't know but if it's God's purpose to work effectually in your heart there will come a time sooner or later when you will be conscious of a change brought in your soul and you will begin to feel very differently about matters than you do now and where you're unconcerned you'll begin to be concerned and where spiritual and holy things matter nothing to you you'll begin to feel that they have weight upon your spirit and where you could live very well enough without any real prayer at all you will find yourself beginning to pray and where you may have no sense whatever of sin and perhaps thought there was nothing really in all that is said about sin you will begin to feel a conviction of it through working in your conscience well now if that should appear in you

I should say I know that's God's purpose God had a purpose towards you a purpose of grace and mercy and truth and now I can see it because I can see his purpose in that is beginning to work in your soul because behind God's work is always God's purpose always it isn't man's purpose a man may have very different purposes from God's purposes very different but it's God's purposes will prevail not man's and always consider this that God's purposes can never be frustrated man's may with the best will in the world we may make our plans and all come to nothing not because our plans are necessarily wrong but because we cannot carry them out because circumstances arise that frustrate our purpose but it can never be so with regard to God's workmanship what he purposes to work he will work and no one can prevent it

I love this view of God working I mean the absolute certainty of his purpose being brought to pass it seems to me if it wasn't for that there would be nothing certain in anything at all absolutely nothing if it were not for the certainty of God's purpose it's wonderful what God can do if it's his purpose to do it some of you listening to me this morning oh what Christians God could make of you what wonderful Christians what manifestations of his grace and love he could make of you if he would graciously work upon your soul you can hardly conceive what he could make of you for if you were his workmanship and even in this present time state where the workmanship of God in grace does appear it gives us very little idea really of what he will make his people to be when he's finished with them when his work of sanctification is complete and they're perfectly conformed to the likeness and image of Jesus

Christ and in the resurrection of the last day it's inconceivable to us what he will make his people to be or we are his workmanship then again I would not only speak a word of regard to the power of this divine workman but I must praise his skill his skill is infallible and in nothing is his skill his wisdom so evident as in his spiritual and gracious work for the heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament showeth his handiwork that's his work and a vast work it is and a much vaster work than our present knowledge extends but it's his skillful work and if we come to our own personal being the psalmist said as for me

[ 31 : 35 ] I'm wonderfully made there's a skill in our natural constitution that's wonderful no human skill could ever devise anything like the faculties of our souls our memory our mind our conscience our will our understanding this is very skillful that God should have given to us all the faculties of our souls no human skill could ever have done it I'm wonderfully made but it's in the workmanship of grace that the skill of God is chiefly seen you think of it brethren that God could make of such as we what he will make us to be his skill in this is wonderful he understands his own work no one else fully understands the old creation was skillful work the creation of grace in Jesus

Christ far more souls what a good thing it is that our lack of wisdom our sense of ignorance in these things doesn't hinder God's working he knows exactly how to do what he plans to do and to make jewels for his crown out of the muddiest filthiest pebbles of this world he knows just how to do it wonderful isn't it you never think it possible as the apostle writes to the Corinthians he describes the condition of some of the worst in that vile city for it was in Paul's days and he said now some of you godly people were like that such were some of you we read those who are without fault before the throne of God and you think of some of them as they were in this world they were not without fault were they we are his workmanship there's just one other point I've time to mention and then

I must leave the subject this morning now I would not only praise up the purpose and the skill of this divine workman I must speak a word about his power for this work needs power to create is the greatest exercise of power possible all other power than that which is divine can only work on something that's there to work on god can create he can create something that's not there and then work on it in the soul and so the lord said to encourage the prophet of old and of course it's equally true to this day I create the heavens and the earth saith the lord is anything too hard for me anything for to create the heavens and the earth was so great a work and required such almighty power that nothing can be too hard for a god who could do that now have you ever felt this power in your soul if you're god's workmanship you have the power came to you didn't it some went somewhere and began to act effectively in your poor soul

I know that this power of god in the new creation acts variously sometimes quite violently like it did when it arrested Saul and when it took that Philippian jailer to the bottom and he came in trembling but it was the same power that acted in Timothy who knew the scripture from his youth and Lydia whose heart the lord opened but all the same it's power brethren there's no hope for anybody apart from the power of god working in their soul unbelief is so strong that nothing but the power of god can subdue it the soul is so dead that nothing but the power of god can quicken it and sin has such dominion that nothing but the power of god can overcome it there's no hope for anyone apart from the power of god and there's hope for everyone in the power of god that it might work effectually in their soul for we are his workmanship created in christ jesus unto good works which god hath before ordained that we should walk in them now see

I want to open this subject to your mind there's a divine worker we are his workmanship not man's man may have been instrumental but we're not man's workmanship we are his then there's the work it's a creation in christ jesus and then there's the purpose of the work it is unto good work now I leave the subject there less less than done I leave your wife I live I have to wish them you they put in inheritance