

God's Creation And Our Works

Reacting to God's Creative Efforts

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We are going to begin the sermon in Genesis 45.

Genesis 45:3-8 Then Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph; does my father still live?" But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed at his presence. And Joseph said to his brothers, "Please come near to me." So they came near. Then he said, "I am Joseph your brother, whom you sold into Egypt. But now, do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. For these two years the famine has been in the land, and there are still five years in which there will be neither be plowing nor harvesting. And God sent me before you to preserve a posterity for you in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt."

The story of Joseph is one of those that we have learned (most of us, anyway) from childhood. We are very familiar with it. And we know that Joseph got into Egypt by means of a little bit of his own smart aleck attitude and behavior, combined with the jealousy of his brothers for the favor that he had received in the eyes of his father. But there is a part of this story that maybe is not as effectively made in times past. So I am using this, then, as a jumping off point for this sermon. Perhaps I could have begun this sermon much earlier in the history of Israel, but I think that this will be sufficient to do what I want it to do for this sermon.

The key statement for this sermon is one that Joseph made, and it is one that we all need to consider the implications of much more carefully perhaps than we do. I am going to reread verses 5, 7, and 8:

Genesis 45:5 "But now therefore do not be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life."

Genesis 45:7-8 "And God sent me before you to preserve a posterity for you in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt."

Now, I think at this point in the story (if we could just put ourselves back into the twelve brothers' time) that they—eleven of them—did not understand at all what was going on. But Joseph perceived something that they did not perceive. It could very well be that those eleven—well maybe Benjamin did not have very much to do with it—but at least ten of them were carrying a burden throughout their lives. And well they should have, because they did not act very well.

But Joseph saw something that they did not see—that God had manipulated that whole affair! I do not mean that He necessarily *made* the brothers do what they did. It could have been the choices of human nature that motivated them to do what they did then. But Joseph is very clearly saying that it was God who made sure that he would be in Egypt. So his brothers were really simply *reacting* to the pressures that the unseen God was putting on them *as He moved events* towards the ends that He desired.

Genesis 46:2-4 Then God spoke to Israel [Now we have moved from Joseph to Jacob.] in the visions of the night, and said, "Jacob, Jacob!" And he said, "Here I am." And He said, "I am God, the God of your father; do not fear to go down to Egypt, for I will make of you a great nation. I will go down with you into Egypt, and I will also surely bring you up again; and Joseph will put his hand on your eyes."

That was a very gentle way of telling Jacob that he was going to die there, and Joseph would close his eyelids.

The Bible does not give us a great deal of information as to how Israel came to be slaves in Egypt, after initially being received with such great favor by the Pharaoh that was there at the time of Joseph. It only tells us that a new king arose, and that he feared Israel's growing population would overthrow him. It says:

Exodus 1:8-10 Now there arose up a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. And he said to his people, "Look, the people of the children of Israel are more and mightier than we; come, let us deal shrewdly with them; lest they multiply, and it happen, in the event of war, they also join our enemies and fight against us, and so go up out of the land."

The narrative then, through the book of Exodus, continues to reveal to us that it was *God* who preserved Moses' life during the slaughter of the children—what was part of the solution to the problem, according to the Pharaoh. He [God] miraculously spared him from death by delivering Moses into the hands of Pharaoh's own daughter—right into the enemy's own household! God, then, supplied his own mother, Jochebed, to nurse and to care for him as he grew.

It was *God* who prepared Moses for eighty years to be the deliverer of Israel from their bondage, and made sure that he was instructed in all the wisdom of Egypt. It was *God* who raised up Pharaoh and hardened his heart. It was *God* who brought the plagues upon Egypt, and it was *God* who separated Israel from them following the third one.

You will recall that, as we were going through the sermon yesterday ["The Wavesheaf and the Selfsame Day"], that it was God who chose *the exact date* that Israel would leave Egypt—so that it would conform to the promise made to Abraham all the way back in Genesis 14-15. It was God, we are going to see here:

Exodus 13:17-18 Then it came to pass, when Pharaoh had let the people go, that God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near; for God said, "Lest perhaps the people change their minds when they see war, and they return to Egypt." But God led the people around by way of the wilderness of

the Red Sea. And the children of Israel went up in orderly ranks out of the land of Egypt.

So it was *God* who chose the path that Israel would follow to the Promised Land. It was *God* who deliberately led Israel into a box canyon so that they would be trapped there—with walls on two sides, the sea on the other side, and Pharaoh and his army coming up behind. And He said that He did this in order that Israel and the Egyptians would be forced to see Him display His power by parting the Red Sea.

Numbers 9:15-23 Now on the day that the tabernacle was raised up, the cloud covered the tabernacle, the tent of the Testimony; from evening until the morning it was above the tabernacle like the appearance of fire. So it was always: the cloud covered it by day, and the appearance of fire by night. Whenever the cloud was taken up from above the tabernacle, after that the children of Israel would journey; and in the place where the cloud settled, there the children of Israel would pitch their tents. At the command of the LORD the children of Israel would journey, and at the command of the LORD they would camp; as long as the cloud stayed above the tabernacle they remained encamped. Even when the cloud continued long, many days above the tabernacle, the children of Israel kept the charge of the LORD and did not journey. So it was, when the cloud was above the tabernacle a few days: according to the command of the Lord they would remain encamped, and according to the command of the Lord they would journey. So it was, when the cloud remained only from evening until morning: when the cloud was taken up in the morning, then they would journey; whether by day or by night, whenever the cloud was taken up, they would journey. Whether it was two days, a month, or a year that the cloud remained above the tabernacle, the children of Israel would remain encamped and not journey; but when it was taken up, they would journey. At the command of the LORD they remained encamped, and at the command of the LORD they journeyed; they kept the charge of the LORD, at the command of the LORD by the hand of Moses.

You can see that things are beginning to develop. This is *not* an accident. The people of God are *led by God* in and out of things! The people of God

move forward at the command of God. They stop at the commandment of God. They are dispersed and scattered by the command of God. They are brought together by the command of God. It is God who raises up leaders. It is God who puts down leaders—in the church.

We need to get the point here so that we are in the right position in relation to God, who is *the Creator*. He is the Designer—not only of all things on earth, but of His Family too! And He is the Designer and Creator of *you*—physically and spiritually.

So it was God who determined where they would camp, how long they would remain there, and then what path they would follow whenever they next moved. But suppose any Israelite (at any time), using his free moral agency, *chose to resist* yielding to the pressures that God was putting on them, and decided to go in another direction. What does this section of the Bible show? *They died!* Very simply put—if they chose to use their free moral agency not to go in the direction that God wanted them to go, then they died.

Exodus and Numbers are a record—sometimes containing names—of those who did such a thing. Some of the better known ones are Korah, Dathan, Abiram, and On, and 250 other men (unnamed) who objected to Moses and Aaron being the leadership; and they died. Nadab and Abihu, in a little bit different situation, chose—using their free moral agency—to do the incense offering in a different manner than God had instructed, and they died.

Please understand. I just happened to think of something. I want you to understand that I am not giving you this sermon to put you in terror. At the same time, I do want us to fear God and to be well aware that He is running the show. He has not stopped doing things along the same lines, following the same patterns as He did then. These things are in there to show us the patterns by which He works.

When the church blew apart, it was *God* who did it! He may have used Satan as an instrument, but that is all he was—an instrument. If God did not want the church to blow apart, believe me, it never would have blown apart. God

wanted it blown apart, for His reasons. These reasons (that is, the answers to them) will become available to us as we go along here. If we are just patient and stick with Him, the answers will come.

Psalm 78:40-41 How often they provoked Him in the wilderness, and grieved Him in the desert! Yes, again and again they tempted God, and limited the Holy One of Israel.

At the second year mark in the wilderness, the Israelites chose not to go into the Land because they feared the Canaanites. They would have been better off going into the Land. They died anyway—at the hand of the Canaanites (but not in the Land). Time and again, some chose not to yield to God—deciding that they would no longer walk the walk, or work the work, that God intended for them. And they, too, died.

In this sermon, I am going to go back over and through a number of scriptures that I used at the beginning of my previous sermon on this subject—a sermon that I gave on February 24, 2001 ["God's Rest (Part 1)"]. I am going to do this because I got enough reaction to know that some did not understand, thinking that I was saying that we do not have to do any works. Far from it, brethren. Or thinking that I was soft-pedaling our works, making that of no account. I am also going to add a few more scriptures to clarify and reinforce that GOD—not us—is the Creator! He is the One who is the Prime Mover in *what we become* following conversion. He is shaping and forming us.

I also want to show that we (just like those we read of) are, largely, merely reacting to GOD. You have reacted to the scattering of the church. You used your free moral agency. Maybe you could have gone with United. Maybe you could have gone with Living. Maybe you could have gone with Philadelphia. And maybe some of you did. And then you used your free moral agency to go somewhere else. But now you are here. Herbert Armstrong use to say, "Nobody dragged you in here." And I can say the same thing.

Growth and conversion are the fruit of our *yielding to God's creative manipulations*. Never forget something that Jesus said. It is recorded in John 15.

John 15:5 "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing."

It is the "without Me, you can do nothing" part that I am concerned about here. Right within the context, the "do nothing" refers to producing spiritual fruit. And without Him, and whatever it is that He is doing in our behalf, we would *never* produce fruit that is useful for completing God's purpose within us.

Was Jesus exaggerating when He said, "Without Me, you can do nothing"? Was that an exaggeration? Was that just so much hyperbole that He was using for self-aggrandizement purposes? Hardly! It may have been an understatement.

II Corinthians 5:16-18 Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh [Paul writes]. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now [that is, from this time on] we know Him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation.

Now, consider this: Creation is the product. It is what is produced. It is the product of intelligent, imaginative, and artistic ability—and, thus, power in action. Every one of those things is a power, but it is in action. It is working. These "powers" (intelligence, imagination, or vision, and artistic ability) are brought to bear on something else in order to bring into existence something that did not exist before.

Each and every Christian is *a new creation*! That is what Paul said. Each and every Christian is a new creation—one that did not exist before! Consider this: Does the non-Christian (the unconverted person) create himself into a Christian? Does the Christian create himself into God?

I more or less jokingly asked, at the beginning of that previous sermon, whether you knew of any created thing that creates itself. It only happens in the misguided world of evolution, through what people call "natural selection." But, brethren, everything that we look at in the material world is created. And that pattern is reproduced in the spiritual world. It is the type of what is going on spiritually.

When we say that the overall purpose of life is that God is reproducing Himself, are we not saying that *God is doing the creating*? We say it without even thinking of it in these terms. If you are reproducing something, then you are creating something that is just like an original model. In this case, the "original Model" is God Himself. He is reproducing—He is creating—new things that are just like Himself.

Consider it this way: Does each and every human baby born create itself in its mother's womb? Each baby is the creation of its parents through the powers of the operation of God's laws. New creation is what the word "reproducing" is implying. And the Christian is God putting on the finishing touches of the material creation, written of in Genesis 1. The finishing touches are created within the relationship with God.

This is why I said to you (who have been with us for quite a long period of time) many, many years ago—maybe in 1992 or 1993 at the latest—that the *relationship with God* is the most important thing in your life. You had better guard it and preserve it with your life! It is **the key** to eternal life.

Powers, forces, outside and apart from the created thing are brought to bear—in order to bring it, the created thing, into existence. God is saying, through Paul (here in II Corinthians 5), that this same basic creative process brings a Christian into existence out of the raw material of our pre-conversion, carnal, anti-God state. From other scriptures, we can know that this creative process begins with our calling.

John 6:44 No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws [call] him; and I will raise him up at the last day.

That word "No" (that starts that verse) is only two letters, but it is important. Not one single human individual ever came to Christ without God calling him. If the person is not called, there is no possibility of a new creation.

I Corinthians 2:10 But God has revealed them [That is, what God has prepared for those who love Him.] to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God.

The calling comes, and then revelation takes place. And God does this by His Spirit.

Psalms 104:30 You send forth Your Spirit, they are created; and You renew the face of the earth.

God sent forth His Spirit to us, and just as surely as things changed on the surface of the earth when that re-creation took place (in Genesis 1), so things began to change in the life of each called person when God sends forth His Spirit.

One of the most significant changes is one's outlook on life. This is why Paul states, in II Corinthians 5:16, "Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer." Christ did not change. The rest of mankind did not change. Paul changed! His perception of Christ changed—from an enemy to a Savior.

That never would have happened except that God had worked something in his life—almost instantaneously, in his case. But this begins to be a pattern for all of us to look to; because there were times that, even though maybe we were not fighting God tooth and toenail (the way Paul was), nevertheless we were doing it. The perspective that Paul had in his mind of Christ and other men began to change. So he could no longer look upon others, or regard others—including Christ—as he had during his carnal days. His mind was changing. And the first and most notable change in him was that he was humbled and began to be submissive.

Acts 9:6 So he [Paul] trembling and astonished, said [Notice this:], "Lord, what do You want me to do?" [This is the One that he was shaking his fist at just a little while ago.] Then the Lord said to him, "Arise, and go into the city, and it will be told you what you must do."

Acts 9:15-16 But the Lord said to him [This was Ananias, because he had reservations about baptizing Paul and laying hands on him.], "Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake."

I read that because I want you to understand that, even before God called Paul, He had in mind what He was going to create Paul into. Now, a question: Do you think it is any different with you and me? No, it is not. This is a pattern that He is showing to us.

Now back to II Corinthians 5. I want to reread this because, even though what I am going to say here is not apparent in the English, just rereading it will help a little bit.

II Corinthians 5:17-18 Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. Now all things are of God. . .

Do you see that? "All things are of God"! The converted Christian does not place himself into the church. All of these things pertaining to the new creation are of God.

II Corinthians 5:18 All things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given to us the ministry of reconciliation.

Verses 17 and 18 clarify this operation through grammatical tense changes—showing that there was a decisive break that took place in Paul's thinking, which occurred in the past. The thinking was stated in verse 16, and Paul is actually reflecting on his own time of conversion, and how quickly his mind

changed in relation to what Christ was—from "an enemy" to the greatest help that a person ever had—almost, practically, in the blink of an eye.

And so Paul is stating here, through a grammatical tense change, showing that there was a decisive break which took place (recorded in Acts 9) in his thinking. When he wrote, "old things have passed away"—that is, the old way that he used to think. And then, the new creation began. "Old things have passed away" is written in the aorist tense. And then, the "new creation" part is written in the perfect tense, which indicates a continuing process. There was a decisive break, and from that point on—when the "new creation" began—it has not stopped. It is an ongoing creative process.

This creative process is overwhelmingly the work of God! Even though Paul does not broach the word until II Corinthians 6:14, one of the new things that is created by God through Christ in this process is *a new fellowship*. It says there:

II Corinthians 6:14 Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion [or, fellowship] has light with darkness?

There is nothing in common between the righteous and the unrighteous, except that we are both human. As far as Paul's subject here goes, there is nothing in common. And, back in II Corinthians 5:18, we see how Paul introduces this *fellowship*. He does it through the words "reconciled" and "reconciliation."

II Corinthians 5:18 Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given to us the ministry of reconciliation.

"Reconciliation" means that *peace* has been established between parties that had been antagonistic toward each other. Those parties were *God* and *us*. The basis for the establishment of peace is Jesus Christ.

Romans 5:6-11 For when we were still without strength [That is, when we were unconverted.], in due time Christ died for the ungodly. [Here is the means of reconciliation:] For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.

For the purposes of this sermon, I want you to first note, again (in this context right here), that the initiative—that is, the first acts of bringing us together into a new fellowship—of providing a means of reconciliation was on *God's part*.

Romans 5:8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us [for the ungodly].

These verses confirm, once again, that it is what God does that brings about *a reaction* in us. God knew that men were going to sin. And so, even before the foundation of the world, He provided a Savior. God took that action.

What I am moving toward here is two things. First of all, we have to really understand, we have to believe, and we have to operate our lives with the knowledge that *God is working in and through us*. And though we cannot see it, the best term that I can use is that He is a "hands-on" Creator. He is not distant from us. We are in a relationship with Him. It is a Family relationship that we have with Him. Parents know that their relationship with their children is close, and our relationship with God is even closer than that. He is *in* us! And we have to understand that He is the Creator! It is He that is molding and shaping us. We react.

He acts. *We* react. So these verses here confirm that it is what God does first that brings about a reaction in us. If God had not first called us, if God had not first sent forth His Spirit, if God had not granted us repentance, if He had not empowered us to believe the gospel—we would not be sitting here listening to the sound of my voice. Just as surely as if God had not done first what He did, Joseph would have never been in Egypt. If God had not done first, the Israelites would have never have gotten out of their slavery. If He had not broken the power of Egypt; if He had not divided the Red Sea. . . All along the way, He was opening up doors. And all they had to do was follow Him. All they had to do was choose to follow!

Another way of putting it: All they had to do was choose to yield to what He was opening before them. That is what our work is. Our works are simply yielding to the pressures of His manipulations. And you are doing it. He blew the church apart, and you yielded to the manipulations of that pressure. People scattered in different groups, but you happened to scatter right here, and I feel that He led you here. If God does do, or if He did not do, *what He does*—then there would be no basis for us using our free moral agency in the way that we did, because before then we were anti-God. So our sitting here converted is the fruit of His creative efforts combined with our response to His efforts. And what we begin to see arise out of this is a profound statement that James makes.

James 3:18 And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

God made peace with us. We made peace with Him in repentance. That is what opens the door for the fruits of righteousness. There has to be peace. There has to be reconciliation, if the fruits of righteousness are going to be produced. Anybody who is married—husband or wife—has to know that there will be no peace in the family unless there is reconciliation between the two, and the marriage will never be strong.

If there is no peace, in the case of our relationship with God, we will simply keep on fighting Him as we have always done in the past. We may have been ignorant that we were fighting Him, but fighting Him we were. Without what God does, there is no positive response—as we will see later, as we go on

here. So it is *what God does* that produces the possibility of fruit being borne every step along the way to the Kingdom of God.

Romans 5:9-10 Much more then [That is, much more than the fact that Christ died for us, which Paul mentioned in verse 8], having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.

"Without Me," Jesus said, "you can do nothing." In other words, God not only starts the process; He makes the whole process go—from beginning to end. Without what Christ does, I think every one of us would backslide right out of the church. We are *enabled* to continue on into the Kingdom of God because of Christ.

So the general theme so far is this: Always, brethren, it is what God does first that makes possible what we will become.

What God does first is *grace*. No matter where along the road we happen to be, it is favor in action. Bullinger, in his book, *Number in Scripture*, says this: "Favor shown to the miserable, we call mercy. Favor shown to the poor, we call pity. Favor shown to the suffering, we call compassion. Favor shown to the unworthy, we call grace."

In the Bible, it is God who is always shown as taking the initiative to reshape man into what he can become. He is the Deliverer.

Ephesians 2:8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.

The *grace* is the gift of God. The *faith* is the gift of God. Is there anything that we have that does not come from God? The answer to that is, "No." And I am going to prove it to you.

Ephesians 2:9-10 Not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

God had this all planned out. It is very clear here that salvation (that is, deliverance from our pre-conversion, anti-God condition) is not accomplished by our works. In verse 10, Paul makes it very clear that God delivers us. That is what he means by saying, "We are His workmanship." We do not create ourselves into what He wants us to be. We are *His* workmanship!

"Workmanship" refers to God's spiritual creation. And it is His workmanship, shaping us into something other than what we were before, that delivers us. But all too often, we keep up the painful kicking against His prodding to bring the changes that He wants in our lives. That is why the word "created" is needed. God has the vision. God is the Designer and the Power. And it is through the combination of these elements that we are delivered—saved from what we were. Is that not what the pattern shows us in Egypt? He had the power. He had the vision. And He was the One who used that so that they could escape from what they were.

The most important things in our lives are the goals, that is, the ends, towards which God is working. One of His goals (as is stated here in Ephesians 2:8-10) is that we become able to do works that we could not do before. If we could already do the works, that would eliminate the need for new creation.

The second goal is that we fit into Christ Jesus. It says, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus." Now turn with me back to Ephesians 1.

Ephesians 1:22-23 And He put all things under His feet [The Father has done this. He has put everything under Christ's feet—meaning under His authority and power.], and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body [which we are being created into], the fullness of Him that fills all in all.

This verse reflects one of several metaphors used to illustrate our relationship to creation. That is, God's creation here. Here, in this case, "the body." As in the human body, with many functioning parts, all of which (all of those parts) contribute to the working of the whole (the whole body). But in these two verses, we are seen as *the fullness* of Christ's body. He is the head. We fill out—or complete—the body of Him who fills the universe with all things. That is what that says, in plain English. "We are the fullness of Him who fills the universe with all things." What a lofty position we have!

He, as the Head, infuses all of us with His life and character. It comes from the Head. He fills us, infuses us, with His life and character. And we are being created—fitted—into this spiritual organism in such a way that we will be in perfect agreement (that is, of the same mind and character) as the Head. But brethren, we cannot do this on our own! First of all, we do not know whether God wants us to be an arm, or an intestine, or a liver (if you get my drift here). It is He who puts us into the body as it pleases Him.

I Corinthians 12:18 But now has God set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased.

I Corinthians 12:27-28 Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually. And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues [and so forth].

Are all apostles? Of course not! And so the church consists of many parts; and each of those parts have been assigned by God to function in a certain area of the body, as we begin to fill out Christ. So God is the One who is placing us. If you were choosing for yourself, where would you be? You might say, "Well, I want to be right in the eye—to watch everything that is going on." But we do not have that choice. The Creator is placing us where *He* wants us; and, who knows, we might be part of the colon.

When God created Adam and Eve—but we will focus on Adam—you can be sure that every cell in his body was designed and created with infinite care. Liver cells for the liver, heart cells for the heart. This is because liver cells do

not work in the heart, and heart cells do not work in the liver. Each cell performs as it was designed, in the place that it was designed and created for. And the same is true of each of us in relation to the Family government that God is creating.

Did Adam's cells create themselves? You know that the answer to that is, "No." So why should we expect anything less for the very pinnacle of God's creation? (us, in His image.) Every cell in the body of Christ is being worked on individually by a Master Designer, and Creator, and Potter—whatever you want to call Him. Engineer, Architect—whatever it is. Every cell is being worked on *individually*. Does God only spend time preparing the great leaders—like Abraham and Moses, David and Paul? And does He simply ignore the other cells (you and me) in this magnificent body?

I Peter 2:5-6 You also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture, "Behold, I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone, elect, precious, and he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame."

Here the metaphor is different, but the principle is the same. We are being fitted into a building, by the wise Master Builder. We do not know whether we are being fitted as a part of an outside wall or an inside wall. But you can be sure that every part is fitted with the utmost care by the wise Master Builder. And this, in turn, feeds right into the metaphor of a Family government—the Kingdom of God—because back in John 14, Jesus told His disciples (on that night when He was taken):

John 14:1-3 "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house [in His dynasty, in His Family] are many mansions [places of abode, positions]; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also."

In all three of these metaphors, all we see are generalities. We know that we are going to be kings and priests. Each of these, in turn, indicates areas of

administration. But we do not see specific functions. It is the Father who is creating this Family, or this building, or this body. It is He who has the vision of what He is creating, and it is He who forms us to fit within His vision.

I John 3:1-2 Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now are we children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.

If we are creating ourselves through our own works, I guarantee you brethren, we cannot turn out to be like Him. This verse says that we shall be like Him. But if we are creating ourselves through our works, we cannot be like Him. That is an utter impossibility because we only have vague ideas about what He is like. We look, as Paul said, through a glass darkly. But then, after the resurrection, he says, "we shall know even as we are known"—meaning now.

Which one of you within the sound of my voice can tell me what it is like to be God? Who can tell that they absolutely see everything from God's perspective? And know His will perfectly for each of us? Who can tell me what the special characteristics are needed to perform any specific function in the Kingdom of God? None of us can do that! And that is why John says that we do not know what we shall be. We only know that we shall be like Him.

Even as we progress along the way, God must continually be revealing Himself, His purpose, and things about ourselves—before we can even act to conform. And none of this is even considering that we also must be in good enough *attitudes* to act to conform. That is why John says that if we are not in a good attitude, then He must act to get us into a good attitude.

Is that not what a human parent must do with a child—who has little knowledge of, and experience at, the burdens and responsibilities of being an adult in our cultures? Do not human children have to be prepared by parents to shoulder adult responsibilities? Parents used to rear their children, but now

they want the schools, the daycare centers, the summer camp, or the children's peers to do it. But I guarantee you—God is not going to shirk even one of His responsibilities with any one of us.

Does not Proverbs 22:15 say that foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of correction will drive it far from him? That "rod of correction" can be anything from an embarrassing chewing-out, to a painful and embarrassing spanking, to detailed and long-lasting patience-stretching instruction.

Proverbs 29:15 states that a child left to himself brings his mother to shame. It is the parent's responsibility to cut back, to restrict, the child's use of free moral agency and redirect it into constructive paths—which the parents can see, but the child cannot.

Do we not understand that the "child" in these proverbs is us, as well as our children? It is. And it is what God does first in reference to us (and what we do first in regard to our child) that enables us (and them—that is, our children) to mature properly and to be freed from slavery to foolishness and shame. If parents do little or nothing, the child grows physically, but the foolishness remains.

I John 3:3 And everyone who has this hope in Him [that is, to be like God] purifies himself, even as He [God] is pure.

I said earlier that some misconstrued some of the things that I said in that previous sermon. And I am sorry that I did not give it clearly enough. That is why I am giving it again. And it fits right into the Days of Unleavened Bread here, because we are talking about coming out of sin—missing the mark, being immature children and growing up to be an adult by yielding to the persuasions of God. We are not relieved of any responsibility whatever with God as Creator and manipulating us, trying to persuade us to use our free moral agency to follow what He wants us to follow.

Now, look at this word "purification." Purification requires *work*! If you would look up "purify" in a dictionary, you would find that it means to clear of extraneous elements. Its synonyms are "cleanse, clarify, wash, sanitize, decontaminate, freshen, disinfect." Does doing some of that in some aspect

of your home require work? Did purifying your home from leaven require work? Purification is a hard job.

Philippians 2:12-13 Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.

I said to you in that last sermon that this term "work out" is better stated by using the English word(s) "give expression to" or "manifest." Again, if you look up the word *express* in a dictionary, you will find that it means, "to represent or make known thoughts or feelings in word, gesture, or conduct." It means "to squeeze out." When a cow is milked, the udder is expressed. It is squeezed out, and milk comes out. Is milking a cow work? Yes, it is. It takes work to express. Synonyms for *express* are "articulate, verbalize, put forth, demonstrate, manifest, and exhibit."

Paul is urging us here to demonstrate—to exhibit—the salvation that we already have. The salvation is not complete. He is only asking that we express what we already have, and you cannot express what you do not have. But everybody is required of God as His witness, being His children, to express what we already have as a result of *His creative efforts*. God is not requiring us to do the impossible. But even to demonstrate what we do have is difficult work on some occasions.

Now, Paul goes on from there by stating—and encouraging us—that it is God who works in us both *to will* and *to do*. "Will," when it is used in this context, means "to desire." It is God who gives us the desire. We already talked about He gives us grace. He gives us faith. He gives us the desire. "Will" means to have the inclination. It means to have the intent, to have the resolve, to have the drive, to have the pleasure, to have the *motivation*. Where are we in this equation? (And what we do have seems so hard for us.)

"Both to will and to do." The word "do" means to perform. It is God who gives us the desire, the resolve, the drive, the pleasure *to perform*, to do, to achieve, to carry out, to accomplish, to complete. Just think of this in terms of Adam. Did not God create him so that when He had breathed into him the

breath of life, Adam was ready to go—to express what God had created, what God had already put into him? He was even created intelligent. There was enough in him to name all of the animals that went by. Who enabled Adam to do that?

Brethren, the pattern is the same. It is *God working* in us who puts these things into us. All He wants us to do is to *express* it in the best way that expresses what He has put in—not what the world has put in. So we have a choice there as to what we can do. Again, reflecting back on Ephesians 2:10, what Paul is doing here in Philippians 2 is refining what he already stated in Ephesians. That is, that it is God by His creative efforts who makes it possible to express, or manifest, His way of life because He, by His creation, has previously enabled us to do the good works—just like He did with Adam. (Adam and Eve chose to do the bad ones.)

John 14:10 "Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works."

This was not the first time that Jesus said something very similar to this.

John 10:38 "But if I do, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, that you may know and believe that the Father is in Me, and I in Him."

The reason that I am going through this in this sermon is that I want to put things in our minds, in the right order, so that we do not proudly begin thinking what a great job we are doing of building character. Yes, we do play a part in it. But we have to get the right perspective in this. And this is why salvation is by grace. Our part in this is very small by comparison to what God is doing to enable us to be able to do what He is creating us to do.

That is the way it is with any creation. I do not care what a person invents, the creator infuses into the creation what he (the creator) wants it to do. And that is the way it is with God and us. God *gifts us* to be able to do things. Then, of course, He wants us to choose to do the right and good. But without God doing what He does, we would have no choice but to continue to resist Him.

Does this mean that we are always going to do what He wants us to do? Absolutely not! We make wrong choices, and in the Bible they are called sin. But because God loves us and is full of grace and patience, He keeps masterfully working in us and on us, until we make the right choice. Then He will probably test us on it again to see if we make it right two times in a row. And then three, and four—and, as we do, it becomes part of the character.

I Corinthians 4:6-7 Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively transferred to myself and Apollos for your sakes, that you might learn in us not to think of men beyond what which is written, that none of you be puffed up on behalf of one against the other. For who makes you to differ from another? [We look around this room, and every one of us is different. Not only are the differences external, they are also internal as well. And we have different places within the body of Christ.] And what do you have that you did not receive? [And now, after you have received it] Why do you boast as if you had not received it?

I have two purposes for going through this in such fine detail. One is that I want all of us to give God the glory for even bringing us as far as He has to this moment.

I Corinthians 1:30-31 But of Him [God] you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption—that, as it is written, "He who glories, let him glory in the Lord."

The second reason is directly tied to the first, and is found in verse 29.

I Corinthians 1:29 That no flesh should glory in His presence.

I do not want any of us to get 'the big head.' I want us to be thoroughly humbled by what is happening in our lives. I want us to be able to be helped to put things in the right order. And first of all, none of what is happening makes us in any way inherently better than anybody else. Was Jacob better

than Esau by birth? Does a child choose his parents? Neither did we, on our own, choose God to be our spiritual Parent. He initiated the relationship without any input from us.

Not every parent is careful, determined, and thorough at raising his children. Some parents are better than others. And the children of the good parents are blessed indeed over other children. But those blessed children did not choose their parents. Their parents 'made' the children by being good parents. That is, made the children blessed (by being good parents). The children have nothing to brag about in this regard.

Our position in regard to God and fellow man parallels this human circumstance. We did not choose our spiritual Parent—God. He favored us by revealing Himself and putting us into His Family. It does make us more *blessed*, and exceedingly more *responsible to yield*—because He chose to shoulder the responsibilities of our spiritual growth. The glory goes to Him, but human nature is such that we can very easily fall into what can be a very great spiritual pitfall.

Luke 18:9-13 Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank you, that I am not as other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.' And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God be merciful to me a sinner!'"

It says "a sinner" in the King James, but that is wrong. The Greek says "*the* sinner."

Luke 18:14 "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

I want you to notice the works of the Pharisee. They are works that any one of us would recognize as "good works." And when Jesus gives us the point

of the illustration, He does not find fault with the Pharisee's works. Rather, He finds fault with the Pharisee's self-exaltation and reliance on what he is doing—not realizing that it was *given* to him to be able to do that.

The potential pitfall of those who serve (even if the service is to God, as this Pharisee's) is pride—the vanity of elevating the self because of what one is doing. The Pharisee even thanked God that He had kept him from being such a great sinner as those other men; but his thoughts were really on himself and his works. You can see that there is an evaluation going on here. The Pharisee says, "I am not as others." And through his pride in his works, he has positioned himself as the model that others should imitate. What he is forgetting is that he is still *a great sinner* by comparison to God.

We continue to need the pardon and cleansing that He can give. It is only one step from this to where the self-evaluation will presumptuously motivate him to be overtly responsible for molding and shaping others than his own children into what *he* thinks they should be. I wonder how many marriages have been destroyed because a wife tries to overtly change her husband? God is the Creator! God requires of us that we *change ourselves*; and we become the kind of husband, or kind of wife, that we ought to be.

There is no doubt that the man's works exceeded the letter of the law. But the man became the victim of a deceitful heart, which lured him into a pride that might even be considered as possessing a touch of arrogance. But the man little realized that his pride had separated him from God every bit as effectively as the extortion, injustice, and adulteries of those that he was belittling.

So, whose prayer was accepted here? Who was made right with God? It was the man of humility, who clearly saw his place in life. He was the sinner—the worst one on earth. He was *the* sinner.

Let this illustration be a counterbalance to the drift toward any self-exaltation, and pride, and reliance upon our works that the deceitful heart tends to pull us towards.

Luke 17:5 And the apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith."

So the Lord gives this thing about the grain of mustard seed, and then He said:

Luke 17:7-10 "And which of you, having a servant plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, 'Come at once and sit down to eat'? But will he not rather say to him, 'Prepare something for my supper, and gird yourself and serve me till I have eaten and drunk, and afterward you will eat and drink'? Does he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I think not [Jesus said.]. So likewise you [This is the advice for the disciples.], when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, 'We are unprofitable servants. We have done that which was our duty to do.'"

This parable teaches us, first of all, that our obedience—our works of service—does not put God into the debt of those who serve Him. The reason is because (as Jesus so succinctly states here), when we do these acts of obedience, we are only doing what is required of us anyway. When we come to understand this correctly, we will then know that our acts of obedience, our services, are the result of what God has aforetime prepared us to do. Do you get my drift here? He has already created it in us to be able to do it. We have merely become the instrument for carrying the works out.

Now, think of this. Can a bird exalt itself because it can fly? Or a fish because it can breathe under water? Or a race horse because it can run a mile in two minutes? The same pattern is true in the spiritual areas as well.

Romans 9:22-23 What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction [Oh boy, that is a head scratcher there. Every once in a while He prepares people for destruction.], and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy [us], which He had prepared beforehand for glory.

We are prepared beforehand to carry out the works that we do. How can we then brag when it was He who empowered us to be able to do it? He created it within us! We chose to do it, and that is good—very good. That is what we are supposed to do.

John 3:27 John answered and said, "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven."

Brethren, God can never be taken out of the equation of our lives! We are *His workmanship*, created unto Christ Jesus unto good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. We are all *created* and *prepared* to keep His commandments. We can do it. We can do it because of His calling. We can come out of our slavery to sins. We can do it, because He works in us both to will and to do. The keeping of them can be expressed. They can be manifested to all of mankind.

But this does not mean that everybody can do all things equally well, because the same Creator is also preparing them for specific responsibilities. The heart cannot do what the lungs do, and the lungs cannot do what the liver does. At the same time, every part of the body contributes to the versatility and well being of the whole body. But everybody does not do everything equally well, even in the part of the body that they are prepared to serve in. This is because they are not as completely, or specifically, prepared—and have not grown yet to the place where they can handle each and every responsibility or job, well.

Now, let us finish in Psalm 51. Notice what David asked of our Creator.

Psalm 51:7-12 [David asked the Creator:] Purge me. . . and I shall be clean. [He asked the Creator:] Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. [He asked the Creator:] Make me hear joy and gladness. . . Blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart. . . Restore to me the joy of Your salvation.

Brethren, we are not creating ourselves through our works. We are using our free moral agency to respond to what the Creator is enabling us to do. That is hard enough to do, all by itself—because it always seems like we are being

required to do something that we feel very uncomfortable doing. It is sort of like learning to ice skate, or to bowl, or to play the violin or piano. And we must do this, it seems, with everybody watching and listening.

We are disciples. We are *learning* to be Christ-like. We have never been this way before. But we are *being prepared* to do just that. So let us respond by faith, knowing that a great work is going on in us—and not be afraid that we will not be able to do what He wants us to do. It is He who works in us, both to will and to do. He is not requiring the impossible. We can do it!