

The chief end of the great change

Ephesians

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Bible Text: Ephesians 2:7-10

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Ephesians 2:7 to 10.

7 That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: 9 Not of works, lest any man should boast. 10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

Amen. Thus far we read the word of God.

And our theme this evening is "The chief end of the great change." The chief end of the great change. The apostle has described what these Ephesians were in verses 1 to 3, and through them unto himself in verses 4 to 6, and now, why this has happened, what is the purpose of it all, what is the aim of it all? We often hear people, not as often as perhaps we would like, but we hear people talking about what's the meaning of life, why are we here, and so on. Well, Christians know why. Christians know why. And so these verses are showing the aim, the overriding aim and goal of this gracious change which God had wrought in these Ephesians.

First of all, the everlasting display of divine grace. The everlasting display of divine grace. Verse 7, "That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus." This is the ultimate goal of the saving work of God in quickening, in enlivening his people together with Christ, that his grace and his kindness through Christ Jesus should be displayed. His grace is displayed in the giving of his Son and in the bestowment of the blessings of salvation purchased by his Son. God's grace, his kindness to the undeserving, his kindness to the ill-deserving is shown in redemption accomplished, the giving of his Son, and in the bestowment of all the blessings that Christ has purchased for them and this quickening, this bringing to life, this making willing by the Spirit the elect of God so that they believe on the Lord Jesus,

this is a blessing purchased by Christ and it is of God's grace, both in its purchase and in its application. And this grace, this kindness to the undeserving, is also called kindness or mercy to those who greatly need it, the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness. Grace indicates kindness to the ill-deserving and the word kindness indicates mercy to those or favor to those who need it. The one stresses the ill-deserved, the other the desperate need.

And so God shows his grace in his kindness and he shows the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness. Our ill-desert was great. We deserved wrath and nothing but wrath and our need was exceedingly great. We were without strength, utterly unable to rescue ourselves and he has shown the exceeding greatness of his grace and kindness. And he displays that grace and kindness in the ages to come, that is, in all that is future, forever future, in this world and beyond. You see, there is sequence between future in this world and then future beyond this world, and so in all ages to come, all future, all the future, those who are quickened together with Christ to display his grace and kindness, forever God will be shown to be a God of grace and mercy that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy and be aforeprepared unto glory, Romans 9, 23.

And in the next chapter, chapter 3, in verse 10, "To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God." And then verse 21, "Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end." There it is speaking more especially as we will see, God willing, when we come to it, the purpose of God in the display of his glory in the church as made up of Jew and Gentile, one church, displaying his glory forever.

And the glory that is displayed is especially the glory of his grace. Revelation 7, to which we often refer, Revelation 7 and verse 9, "After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; And cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb. And all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders and the four beasts, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God, Saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen." Now there you see that redemption is a cause of worship to those who are redeemed, but it's also a cause of worship to the angels because the glory of God is displayed, and so the worship of heaven, which begins on earth in the hearts of God's people, is a worship of gratitude for mercy received but there is also the adoration of the glory of that mercy displayed, not only on account of our being the recipients of it, but in itself the manifestation of the glory of God.

But you might say, and some have been foolish enough to say, "If God determines to display his own glory, is this not in a sense selfish of God, that is, that God should display his own glory, that this should be the end of all things?" Not at all. It's right. It's right. It is the only great end of all things compatible with the holy character of God. It is not compatible with God's holiness that the glory should belong to the creature, but to the Creator. The reason self-glorification is sinful in us is precisely because we are creatures.

That's what makes it sinful. Self-glorification in a finite creature is indeed sinful and selfish and pride, but not in God, because the glory rightly belongs to God, and so God's holiness requires that God should display his own glory and demonstrate the dependence of all his creatures upon him. So it should not be otherwise, but that God should determine to display his own glory, for he had made all things for himself.

So God will display his glorious grace forever in us, both now in the effects of this quickening and in the world to come, when our calling reaches its goal in the glory of the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ. What a joy it is to the redeemed to be a reflector of the glory of God. We rejoice in hope of the glory of God, that is, of beholding that glory, but also that we shall reflect that glory. Our glorified state and the completion of the bestowment of the blessings of salvation will display God's glorious grace. "Who are these arrayed in white robes? They are they that have been brought out of much tribulation, who have had their robes made white in the blood of the Lamb." That is, that we shall be forever instruments displaying the glory of God's grace. And this is a joy to God's people. They desire to show forth his praise in this world, and it is a joy to them that in the world to come they will be perfected in holiness, and all that they are and do will display the greatness and the glory of God.

Then secondly, salvation, all of grace. Salvation, all of grace. Verse 8, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God." Here he is explaining, or as it were reinforcing, that the goal of God's purpose in the salvation of his people is that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness towards us through Christ Jesus. And here is why it shall be so. Why will it be that God's grace will be displayed forever in those who are saved by him? And the answer is because salvation is of grace. That's why. Their salvation must in the ages to come show the exceeding riches of his grace in Christ Jesus, because their salvation is all of grace. The blessings they receive are the fruit of Christ's death. They are the travail of his soul. He purchased every one of them, including this quickening.

So yes, God's grace will be displayed forever in them, because their salvation is all of grace. They are saved by grace. This is the source of salvation. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish but have everlasting life." The grace of God is the cause of salvation and this includes the gift of faith. The apostle says through faith, yes it's through faith, we believe in justification by faith. God is just and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus. But then lest anyone should say, "Well then yes, it's of grace that believers are justified, it's of grace that Christ died for them but surely, surely we should be given some credit for believing." But no, he says, "for by grace are you saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God." He's closing that door so that not even the believing is of ourselves, it is of grace. He's closing out all possibility of anything but the grace of God being eternally displayed in the salvation of his people. In heaven there will be no boasting. In heaven there will be no free-willism. There will be no one pretending that they got there because of their own free will. "That in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus," that faith is a gift of God purchased by the Redeemer and bestowed effectually by the Spirit, quickening a sinner so that they are willing to believe on Jesus Christ.

And so the apostle ascribes even the believing to God's grace, so 2 Timothy 2:24 and 25, "For the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth." And this is why no ground must be given to Arminianism, the idea of man having an independent free will. It isn't a mere detail. You see, it's like this, non-Christian religion generally teaches self-salvation, you do it yourself. Modernism or liberalism regards salvation as unnecessary. Roman Catholicism teaches that salvation is a shared affair between God and man and Arminianism does the same. True, it acknowledges more, it ascribes more of salvation to God than Roman Catholicism does but at the end of the day, it still seeks to teach that salvation is partly of God and partly of man. Only the biblical gospel, historically called the Reformed faith, but it was in the word of God, although centuries before the Reformation, but at the Reformation it was rediscovered and formulated in its glorious scriptural proportions, only this message ascribes the whole of salvation to God. Only this. This is unique. Biblical Christianity is unique in that it ascribes the whole of salvation to God. All other forms of belief, in one way or another, ascribe all or part of salvation to man. Or, they say he doesn't need a salvation. But only biblical Christianity declares that man desperately stands in need of salvation and that salvation is entirely and in all its parts of the Lord.

That brings us thirdly, works an effect, not a cause of divine favor. Works an effect, not a cause of divine favor. Verse 9, "Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." Here the apostle is putting good works in their proper place because good works are not simply what we might deem to be good works. Good works are those works done out of love to God and desire for his glory. And such good works are an effect, not a cause of divine favor, no merit secures the favor of God.

So in Romans 9 and verse 11, "For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth." Why did God choose Jacob, not Esau? Well, it was not because of Jacob's good works over against Esau's. They hadn't done good or evil. The apostle leaves out of the picture completely, as an utter non-starter, the idea of foreseen works. He just says they hadn't done any. So that wasn't the basis of election. It was the good pleasure of God.

Titus 3 and verse 4. Titus 3:4, "But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life." When he says through Jesus Christ our Saviour, this blessing of regeneration, you see that even that regenerating work of the Spirit, which is the cause of faith and thus of justification, it's through Christ. It's purchased by Christ. It's a blessing purchased for the elect of God.

Now the apostle has already, going back to our text, dealt with unconditional election, but here in dealing with its outworking, he stresses its unearned character, not of works, not of foreseen works, not of foreseen faith. Does God foresee who will believe? Well, yes he does but how does he foresee who will believe? He foresees who will believe because he has determined who will believe. That's why. Because the question of who will believe is decreed by God and God knows his own mind. That's why. There's no such thing as a foreknowledge without a foreordination otherwise the creature reveals to the Creator, and the whole idea is monstrous. The reason God knows is because God has decreed. God has planned and purposed and he knows his own mind. A God who isn't in control couldn't know the future. The only one who independently knows the future is the one who would decree the future and that's God. We can know so far as God tells us but otherwise no one knows the future.

And so God has eternally determined who will believe and it's not on the basis of any good works. He's described what the elect of God are like before they are quickened by his grace, they're dead in trespasses and sins, they walk according to the course of this world and so on. It is an unearned favor, not of works, lest any man should boast. The apostle is very jealous to exclude all possible grounds of human boasting, that there should be no loophole, no crevice, nothing that man can say, "I did it." And that's why it matters because that is exactly in accord with the divine purpose.

1 Corinthians 1. 1 Corinthians 1 and verse 27, "But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence. But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord."

God saves in that manner which excludes all boasting in man, that no flesh should glory in his presence. That alone would tell you that the Arminian doctrine of free will has to be wrong for the simple reason that it is incompatible with the divine purpose that no flesh should glory in his presence. That alone tells you it's wrong and the apostle here is closing up all possible ground of boasting. Not of works, lest any man should boast. It's by grace. It's through faith. It's through God-given faith. Justification is not by works. Election is not secured by works. The favor of God is not drawn down by works. Where do works fit in? Well, the only works that are truly good are the effects of God's grace, the effects of his favor. So verse 10, "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them."

You see, it's not good works bringing the favor of God. It's grace that results in good works. There is no good work in man that isn't the effects of grace. God's gracious workmanship, we are his workmanship, referring not merely to our existence, though that's of God too, but to recreation. "If any man be in Christ he is a new creature. Behold, all things are passed away, all things are become new," 2 Corinthians 5. Or Galatians 6:15, "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature." A new creature. This indicates God's initiative. A creature comes

into being at the will of the Creator. All these scriptural analogies indicate divine initiative: the quickening of the dead, the new creature. Just as surely as God said, "Let there be," in Genesis 1, "Let there be. Let there be." It was his sovereign decree, his initiative entirely.

2 Corinthians 4 and verse 6, "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." What negotiation was there when God said, "Let there be light"? None. It was a sovereign initiative of God, that God who caused the light to shine out of darkness has shined into our hearts with the light of the knowledge of his glory in the face of Jesus Christ.

But he says we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus. Created in Christ Jesus, because all that is bestowed, all the saving blessings are the application of his redeeming work. All the blessings of salvation bestowed upon us are the travail of his soul. There is not one ounce of spiritual blessing that could be bestowed except as the fruit of his atoning work on the cross. All the blessings, our effectual calling, our keeping, all the blessings we receive from the word, from the means of grace, from Christian fellowship, all that builds us up, they are all purchased, purchased blessings, every one of them. And all good works come from this union. "I am the vine. Except ye abide in me ye can do nothing." Every atom of fruitfulness is the result of our union with Christ, a union which is forged by God himself.

So these good works, they don't cause God to be favorable, they are not the grounds of justification, nor are they the cause of our election and effectual calling. They are the effect. They come as a result of grace. You see how the apostle is again closing out, even his doctrine of the place of good works, he's excluding all human merit. He is saying they come as a result of grace, entirely of grace. They don't secure God's favor either in justification or in constraining election and effectual calling. They are the fruit. They follow.

Gracious effectual calling bring to faith and justification and the good works proceed from that new life bestowed by God in the soul of man, and so much does he tie it down that he says even the good works are ordained beforehand. Look at verse 10 again, "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." So God's sovereign grace renewing the heart, bringing us to faith in Christ, results in good works and God from all eternity has determined exactly what good works we will walk in. The thought is then that God who chose us in eternity and quickened us in time has ordained and prepared all the good works that his grace will enable us to walk in. So much is the apostle concerned to exclude human merit that even the good works that are of grace and are the fruit of faith are foreordained, even the effects of faith are included in the divine decree. Though we are fully responsible and commanded to be holy, yet God in his decree has decreed when we will be effectually called and quickened and brought to faith in Christ and he has determined the exact extent of our progress in holiness, how long we live in this world, how sanctified we'll be before we leave it and are perfected in glory.

The apostle is teaching this in order to show that we don't actually do anything good independently of divine grace, that good works follow the quickening which proceeds from eternal election, that we are saved by grace through faith, it's a God-given faith and the good works follow but even the good works that follow are ordained of God, and it's of his grace that his grace carries us on so that we fulfill those good works that God has decreed we shall walk in and then we shall be perfected in holiness in the world to come. And those who love God's salvation, love to say that it is God who is the source of that salvation. Those who are born of the Spirit and have the seed of God in them, as God has determined that no flesh should glory in his presence, so those who are born of God, those who have something of God's holiness implanted in them, they also have a holy desire to ascribe all of their salvation to God. If the holy God has determined that he alone should be glorified in salvation, those who are partakers of his holiness, they share imperfectly in this world but they share that desire to own God as the author of their salvation in its entirety.

So the apostle, "God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ by whom the world is crucified unto me and I unto the world." Or David, "My soul shall make her boast in the Lord. The meek shall hear thereof and be glad." The meek. Who are the meek? Well, the people of God are meek. They are not as meek as they should be but every real Christian has some meekness. Blessed are the meek. He shall beautify the meek with his salvation. The meek. Everyone born again of the Spirit has a measure of meekness and so David says, "My soul shall make her boast in the Lord. The meek shall hear thereof and be glad." And be glad. Christians love to hear Christians boasting in the Lord and they don't like to hear the opposite either, and that's why real Christians love to hear salvation ascribed to God. So then when we hear that salvation is of grace, and when we hear brethren ascribing salvation to God and to his grace, then let our hearts hear thereof and be glad.