

Picture 3: The Workmanship



Seven Pictures of God's People (Part 5)
by Derek Prince

It's good to be with you again as we draw near to the close of another week. I do hope my talks this week have been helping you to get a clearer picture of yourself as God sees you in the context of your fellow believers. The theme of my talks this week is, "Seven Pictures of God's People." Each of these seven pictures is taken from Paul's epistle to the Ephesians. There is a special reason for this. The epistle to the Ephesians contains, in a unique way, the special revelation which God gave primarily through the apostle Paul of what He intended His people to be. So it's appropriate that we'll find each one of these seven pictures is taken from the epistle to the Ephesians. The first two pictures that we looked at were the assembly of God and the Body of Christ; the assembly and the body.

Today we're going to look at the third picture. The third picture is found in Ephesians 2:10:

> "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works which God prepared in advance for us to do." (NIV)

This is a slightly different kind of picture. We're God's workmanship. I don't think the English translation fully brings out the real significance of that. The Greek word that's there translated "workmanship" is poema. And from that Greek word we get the English word "poem." In other words, it's a word taken from the field of art and creativity. I like to translate it this way—maybe I'm a little too free, but I like to say, "We are God's creative masterpiece." That to me really carries the proper meaning of what Paul is saying. It's kind of breathtaking, isn't it? I don't think it ever would make us proud, but it would cause us to feel really humble, that God chose people such as us to be the materials for His creative masterpiece. When you think of all that God has created, that's amazing.

Let's think of what's involved in a creative work of art for a moment. We can take various examples. For instance, sculpture. What is the essence of sculpture? Well, first of all there's this block of stone or marble or whatever it may be,

and it's unfinished, it's unshapely, it has no real significance, it's just there. But the sculptor, with his inner vision, his creative vision, beneath the external sees something that can be made out of it. And so he arms himself with his sharp chisel and with his inner mental vision of what he wants to produce, he begins to chip away the material: some here, some there. And as he continues working, gradually we see the form emerging, which is the expression of his inner vision. It may be the form of a woman, a child; something like that, an athlete. Of course, there are so many examples of sculpture in Greek antiquity. But there's an inner vision followed by a practical outworking, and the right tools have to be used, and they have to be used with great skill and patience.

Or, we could take a creative masterpiece such as painting. What's the essence of painting? Well, a lot of essays have been written on that theme, but essentially, painting includes the blending of form and color in the right proportions, rightly blended, that bring forth something—maybe it's a scene or an object in nature—nevertheless, the painter by the blending of the shapes and the colors and the forms, helps us to see something in it which we didn't see when we just looked at the scene, or the object. That's the essence of painting.

And so it is with us. God works on us. He blends, He shapes, He positions us, and then He shows us to the world. And the world sees something in us it didn't know was there. Or take one more example, the example of poetry. I've always been particularly interested in poetry. In fact, I have to confess that once upon a time I actually used to write it. What is poetry? Well, poetry is in essence, artistry with words. It's the blending together of words to make a picture, an impression, an impact. And every word has to be the right word, every word has to be in the right place, every word has to be rightly related to the other words.

So when God wants to make us into a poem, each one of us can think of ourselves as either a word, or even smaller, just a letter. And to produce the results that God desires, the real poetic image that God has in mind, each letter, each word, has to be carefully selected and put in the right position and rightly related to all the other words.

So those are some of the implications of the statement that we are God's poema, His creative masterpiece. Listen to what Paul says in this connection in Ephesians 3:10, an astonishing statement. He says this:

> "God's intent was that now, through the Church, through God's people, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms." (NIV)

That's breathtaking. God chose us, His redeemed people, to demonstrate to the whole universe, to the unseen heavenly realms, His manifold wisdom. The word "manifold" is a vivid word. I like to translate it "many-sided." God has chosen us to demonstrate to the entire universe not only in time but through eternity, His many-sided wisdom. And so, each one of us can think of ourselves as just a tiny little refraction of the total wisdom of God. Each believer demonstrates a particular aspect, a unique aspect of God's wisdom. None of us is alike. Each of us, in some way or another, particularly demonstrates the wisdom of God. But we all blend into a harmonious whole. That's wonderful, isn't it?

And I'll tell you another wonderful thing. You may not have thought of it. When God wanted to make His creative masterpiece, which He was going to use for time and eternity to demonstrate His wisdom to the whole universe, where did He go for the material? He went to the scrap heap. He went to the broken pieces of lives that had been marred by sin, broken families, sick bodies, people whose minds had been affected, and He said, "I'll take this from the scrap heap, that the world has rejected, the world doesn't recognize, and out of this scrap material I'm going to make my greatest masterpiece." That's God's people -- His masterpiece taken from the scrap heap.

What was God's purpose in making this masterpiece? Let's go back to Ephesians 2:10 for a moment and see something very practical that Paul had to say. What I like about the Bible is its pictures are very beautiful but they're always very practical, too. I believe anything that's truly spiritual is also practical. So what does Paul say about us as God's poema, His masterpiece? Let's read those words again:

> "For we are God's workmanship, God's masterpiece, created in Christ Jesus to do good works which God prepared in advance for us to do." (NIV)

So that's why we were created, in a practical sense, to do good works which God prepared in advance for us to do. That tells me something important. We're not merely to be ornamental. We are to be useful. We are to fulfill a function. God has got things for us to do. We're not just to stand around and be interesting and spiritual. But God has a job of work for Each one of us believing people to do. And then it says that God has prepared those good works in advance. That tells me that there's no room for improvisation. In a certain sense, none of us is free to write the score for his own life. God has already written the score for each of our lives, and when we yield to God and find our place in that

creative masterpiece, we find that there's something laid ready for us to do, something we might never have dreamed of.

If you had told me a good many years ago that I would ever become a teacher of the Bible, I would have laughed at you. And my friends would have louder harder still, because there was nothing in me at that time that gave the faintest indication of what God wanted to make out of me. So remember, it's for good works which God has before prepared. We don't have to improvise. We have to find those good works and walk in them.

All right. Now for our two-fold application. The essential feature, and what's required of us. What is the essential feature of the workmanship, the masterpiece? I would say without any doubt, its essential feature is it's a demonstration of God's creative genius. God is a creator right from the beginning. He created the heavenly bodies, the stars, the seas, the mountains, the animals, the flowers; but when He'd finished all that, He said, "My masterpiece is still to come." We are that masterpiece, the revelation of God's creative genius. What's required of us? If I were to sum it up in one word, the word would be "yieldedness." If we're a word in the poem, we just take our place. If we're a piece of clay in the potter's hand, we just let him mold us. If we're part of that block of stone, we just let him chip away at us. We don't argue back. We don't say, "God, do you really know what you're doing with me?" The key is yieldedness.

Well, our time is up for today. I'll be back with you again next week at this same time. Next week I'll continue with the remaining pictures of God's people. This week I'm making a special offer of my book, Discipleship, Shepherding, Commitment." The book gives specific, practical instruction as to how we can become the kind of people God wants us to be. It points to a way in which the Body of Christ can become organically united without forming a new denomination.

Also, my complete series of talks this week on "Seven Pictures Of God's People" is available in a single, carefully-edited, 60-minute cassette. Stay tuned for details.

Radio Program

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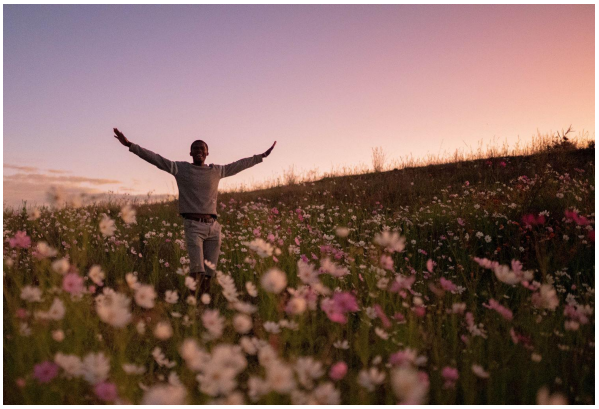

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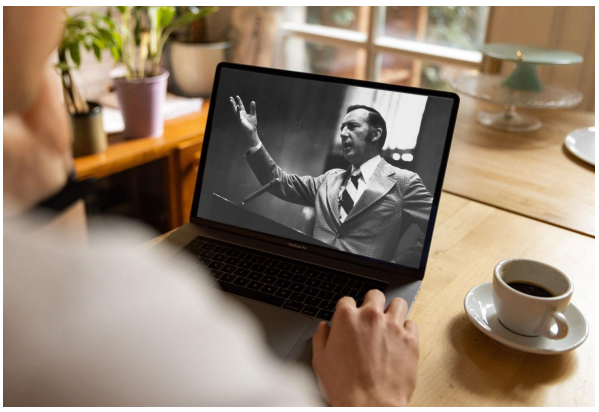

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