THE SINGULAR ORIGIN OF A CHRISTIAN
NO. 1829

A SERMON
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"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God has before ordained that we should walk in them."
Ephesians 2:10.

THIS text is written by the apostle as a reason why salvation cannot be a thing of human merit, "not of works, lest any man should boast, for we are His workmanship." The, *for,* indicates an argument. It is a conclusive reason why salvation cannot be by our good works, because even when we have an abundance of the best of works, they are far more due to God than to ourselves. We ourselves, in our saved condition, are the workmanship of God, and with each of us the argument holds good—"Not of works, for we are His workmanship."

We are so completely the Lord's workmanship that we are also styled a creation. We are "created in Christ Jesus," and a creation cannot possibly be the creature's own work, such a supposition would be absurd upon the face of it. It would be a misuse of language to speak of anything as creating itself. Whatever, therefore, we are in Christ Jesus is the result of God's work upon us, and cannot be the cause of that work.

Moreover, our good works, be they what they may, are the subjects of an ordinance of God—"which God has before ordained that we should walk in them." Truly they are purposed by ourselves, and our will and heart determine them, but far at the back of all this lies the divine purpose by which they were settled from of old. If good works are ordained, as well as the salvation of which they are the evidence, then the whole matter is of divine ordaining, and there is no space left to impute salvation to human works. The tree is not created by its fruit, for the fruit is created with the tree, and is one purpose for which the tree was created. Good works are not the cause of salvation, for they are the result of it, and were contemplated as a result by God when He saved us. The argument deserves to be worked out at greater length, but we have not space for it now.

I want, at this time, to call your attention to four things in the text, and if you can carry in your mind's eye the first creation, and the making of Adam, and what he was made for, and where he was put when he was made, it will serve as a background to the picture of the second creation, which I shall attempt to paint. I would dwell upon man as God's workmanship in a still higher sense than by his first making. I would set him forth as created anew "unto good works, which God has before *prepared"*—for that is the word properly used in the new translation—"which God has before prepared that we should walk in them."

I. To begin, then, notice first, THE SINGULAR ORIGIN OF A CHRISTIAN MAN—of all Christian men, whether Jews or Gentiles, of all Christian men, even if they are the highest apostles, like Paul, or the least of all the family of love, such as we may be. As many, as are truly saved and brought into union with Christ, are the workmanship of God.

No Christian in the world is a chance production of nature, or the outcome of evolution, or the result of special circumstances. "By the grace of God I am what I am," may be said by every man who is saved. To nothing can we ascribe the fact that we are in Christ except this—that we are God's workmanship. Of regeneration we must say once and for all, "This is the finger of God."

The spiritual life cannot come to us by development from our old nature. I have heard a great deal about evolution and development, but I am afraid that if any one of us were to be developed to our utmost, apart from the grace of God, we should come out worse than before the development began. Our flesh would be apt to produce by evolution something exceedingly brutish and devilish. Mr. Whitefield

once raised a great outcry against himself by saying that man by nature was half beast and half devil, I have never seen any reason why the description should be altered, but I have sometimes wondered which was the worse of the two—the devil in the man, or the beast in him.

As to spiritual life coming out of our unrenewed nature, it is impossible. "Out of nothing comes nothing." There is no spiritual life in men dead in trespasses and sins, how then can life come out of them? Out of death truly there comes a something congruous thereto, horrible are the forms of corruption that arise from the body in which death holds sway, but this is dissolution and destruction, and not life. What the corruption of a human soul may be, I cannot attempt to say. Terrible as hell must be, there is nothing in the pit more awful than those who are in it. The lost themselves are more unutterably dreadful than any punishment that justice may have imposed upon them. Developed manhood, developed without any restraining influences, if it is shut up in vast numbers, must be a fermenting mass of hate, envy, malice, lust, cruelty, and pride. Speak of evolution—here it is—"When lust has conceived, it brings forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, brings forth death." Darkness never begets light, filth never creates purity, hell never yields heaven and depravity never produces grace.

But the point is that we are God's workmanship. *We are His workmanship from the very first*. The first stroke that helps to fashion us into Christians comes from the Lord's own hand. He marks the stone while yet in the quarry, cuts it from its natural bed, and performs the first hewing and squaring, even as it is He who afterwards exercises the sculptor's skill upon it. It was the Lord who first taught us our need of a Savior, and gave us our sense of sin, and our early trembling, and our new desires. The faintest breath of spiritual life that was ever breathed by any one of us came from God Himself. We might almost use the same words concerning our new nature as the Psalmist used when he spoke of his body—"Your eyes did see my substance, yet being imperfect; and in Your book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them."

We shall remain the Lord's workmanship to the very last. The picture must be finished by that same Master hand which first sketched it. If any other hand should lay so much as a tint or color on it, it would certainly mar it all. God has commenced the character of His people after so marvelous a sort that no human mind as yet fully comprehends the full design of infinite love, for none know perfectly the matchless character of Jesus, our Lord. "It does not yet appear what we shall be." Since, then, we do not even know what we are to be, we cannot intrude into the work, and take the pencil from the hand of the great Artist, and complete His design, but the Author must be the Finisher of what He has begun.

This is very beautiful to remember, and *it should stir up all that is within us to magnify the Lord*. If it is so, that from the first the Lord has worked all our works in us, what an amount of patience, what an amount of power, what an amount of skill, what an amount of love, what an amount of grace, has God spent upon us hitherto! I was surprised when I was told, the other day, by a friend, who was a maker of steel-plate engravings, how much of labor had to be put into a finely-executed engraving. Think of the power that has cut lines of beauty in such steel as we are! Think of the patience that lent its arm, and its eye, and its heart, and its infinite mind, to the carrying on of the supreme work of producing the image of Christ in those who were born in sin! Think of the skill which makes heirs of God out of heirs of wrath! It seemed impossible when one said that "God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham," but it is more than fulfilled in us. Miracles of grace have been worked upon us as many as the sands on the seashore. How graciously has the Lord endured our opposition to His gracious operations, never violating the freedom of our will, but making us willing in the day of His power! This is one of the greatest of the marvels. See how He has continued to work upon us, year after year, with final perseverance of undiminished love! How much more of power will still be needed, and how much more of long-suffering, and how much more of careful wisdom, before we shall be perfect and complete! According to His riches in grace will He deal with us, and if that should not suffice, He will take a higher standard, and treat us according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus. This we know, that we shall certainly receive all that is needed for completion, for He that has begun a good work in us will perform it unto the day of Christ. Happy is it for us that "we are His workmanship"!

Now, ought we not, dear friends, as far as the Lord has gone with us already, to bless and praise His holy name? Do you not think that it is becoming in all of us, who know that God has been at work with us, to adore Him continually for what He has done? I know you sigh because a part of the picture still looks rough and incomplete. Consider that the Artist has not ended His labor upon that portion of us. Sanctification in its practical issues is not yet ended. But do not sigh so much over the incomplete part as to fail in rejoicing over that which is accomplished. Rejoice that a hand has been laid upon the canvas

which is matchless even in its outlines, and foundation colors, a hand, moreover, which was never yet known to throw away a canvas upon which it had once commenced a masterpiece. Remember that you magnify His work. "He who has worked us for the selfsame thing is God, who also has given unto us the earnest of the Spirit."

One thing I would say to you, who are God's people, if we are His workmanship, never let us be ashamed, to let men see God's workmanship in us. "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." Let us be very much ashamed to let them see the remains of the devil's workmanship in us; hide it behind a veil of repentant grief. Christ has come to destroy it, let it be destroyed. Yet let your simple faith be known and spoken of, even though it is ridiculed by the wise men of the age, who by wisdom know not God. Do not be ashamed of your confidence in your God at any time, even though men burst into a fit of laughter over it as if you must be raving mad, for this also is God's workmanship. Nothing that God has worked is unfit to be seen. Search from the summit of the highest Alp to the bottom of the deepest cavern, and there is neither plant, nor beast, nor insect, nor even grain of dust which is not beautiful in its season. I have heard foolish people half scream at the sight of some poor little insect, or frog, or lizard, but this is from lack of knowing more of the beauty of the creatures which our great Father has formed. If these are quietly looked at, especially if they are examined under the microscope, they amaze us with the marvelous art displayed in them. Nothing that God has made should be despised. Assuredly this is most true in the spiritual kingdom, where the lowest form of grace is lovely as an angel's countenance. All the new creatures of God are surpassingly beautiful, and as far as you, my brothers and sisters are God's workmanship, so far are you comely with the comeliness which He has put upon you. See how the Bridegroom in Solomon's Song extols His bride, fair metaphor of the manner in which the Lord Jesus praises His church. He is an impartial Judge of all that is excellent, but when He views His people as God's work, He is full of admiration. That which is your own work, you may well blush to own, that which is the devil's work, you are bound to detest, but that which is the work of the Holy Spirit in you, will bear inspection, and no guilty fear should cause you to conceal it. Let your meekness, your kindness, your uprightness, your truth, your purity appear unto all men. Never let it be a question whether you are a Christian. Do not tremble at the persecution which the enmity of the ungodly may inflict upon you because you belong to Christ, but rather accept it as an honor, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt.

As to any of you who hear me at this time, and feel forced to say, "Ah, me! I do not see how I, am to be a Christian," let me speak with you. I am thinking of the matter very differently. I see very plainly how you can become Christians, for all of us who are believers are God's workmanship, and that God who has made *us* His workmanship can make you to be the same. "Oh, but I cannot do anything!" Who said you could? Who asked you to do any part of God's work? We are God's workmanship. There is in your fallen nature no power or will towards good, and if the question were about *your* workmanship, the answer would be full of despair, but while God works there is hope.

"Oh, but I have a withered hand!" When Jesus bids you stretch it out, do not inquire about your own power, but look to His power who gives the command. Do not say, "I cannot save myself. I cannot make myself holy"? Look, then, to Him who is a Savior, able to save to the uttermost, who was born for this end that He might save His people from their sins. "We are *His* workmanship," cry all the saints. Do you want to be your own workmanship? He that can work upon one can work upon another. Oh, that you would lie at His feet! Oh, that you would put off all idea of what *you* can do for yourself, and draw comfort from these few words of my text, "We are His workmanship"! What is there that God cannot do for you? Rough material as you are, He can make you what you should be, He can make you what it will delight you to be. God grant that we may learn to look to the strong for strength, and no longer waste our time in inquiring for it where there is nothing but perfect weakness!

Here, then, is the origin of a Christian man, he comes out of the workshop of God.

II. Secondly, here in the text we see THE PECULIAR MANNER OF THIS ORIGIN. "We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus," "Created in Christ Jesus." Catch that thought. Our new life is a creation. This goes further than the former expression, for workmanship is less than creation. A man may produce a picture, and say, "This is my workmanship," a piece of mosaic, or a vessel fresh from the wheel, may be a man's workmanship, but it is not his creation. The artist must procure his canvas and his colors, the maker of a mosaic must find his marbles or his wood, the potter must dig his clay, for without these materials he can do nothing, for he is not the Creator. To One only does that august name strictly belong. None other could create a gnat, or the beam of light in which it dances, or the eye with

which it is seen. In this world of grace, wherever we live, we are a creation. Our new life is as truly *created out of nothing* as were the first heavens, and the first earth. This ought to be particularly noticed, for there are some who think that the grace of God improves the old nature into the new. It does nothing of the sort. That which we possess since the fall is corrupt and dead, and to be buried, whereof our baptism is the type and the testimony. That which is of God within us is a new birth, a divine principle, a living seed, a quickening spirit, in fact, it is a creation; we are new creatures in Christ Jesus. What a sweeping statement! This goes back to the very beginning of grace within us. As we read, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth," so may we say of every man that is born again unto God, that he had no true beginning till God created him, and made him spiritually to be. Creation is the calling of something out of nothing, of light out of darkness, of life out of death. Is not this a fair description of the new birth? Has not this happened to us? When we were nothing, God, in the greatness of His grace, created us in Christ Jesus.

Creation was *effected by a word*. "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made." "He spoke, and it was done, He commanded, and it stood fast." "God said, Let there be light: and there was light." Is not that again an accurate description of our entrance into spiritual light and life? Do we not confess, "Your Word has quickened me"? "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which lives and abides forever." "Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." The Lord breathed upon us by His Spirit, and we lived, He spoke, and we were created in Christ Jesus.

In creation *the Lord was alone and unaided*. The prophet asks, "Who has directed the Spirit of the Lord, or being His counselor has taught Him? With whom took He counsel, and who instructed Him, and taught Him in the path of judgment, and taught Him knowledge, and showed to Him the way of understanding?" After all was done, the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy, but they did not—could not, aid in the work. Creation is the prerogative of Jehovah, and none can share it with Him. So it is in the regeneration of a soul, instrumentality appears, but the real work is immediately of the Spirit of God.

See, then, poor sinners who may hear these words, that they have a relation to you. You are saying, "How can we become Christians?" Why, you can become Christians by being created, and there is no other way. "But we cannot create ourselves," says one. It is even so. Stand back, and quit all pretense of being creators, and the further you retreat from self-conceit the better, for it is God who must create you. How I wish that you felt this! "It would drive us to despair," you say. It might drive you to such despair as would be the means of your flying to Christ, and that is precisely what I desire. It would be greatly to your gain if you never again indulged a shred of hope in your own works, and were forced to accept the grace of God. I seek not to excite in you a proud activity, but a humble reliance in the mercy of God, and a submissive acceptance of His plan of salvation by free grace. Oh, that this might be done! The gospel does not call upon you to save yourselves, but its voice is the echo of that of the Lord in Isaiah 45:22, "Look unto Me, and be you saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else." The Lord does not even ask for your help in your own salvation. When He has worked in you, you may work it out, but that is all. Be ready to be as clay in the hands of the potter, plastic to the touch of the All-creating God, and you shall find that He is the God of salvation, and to Him belong the issues from death. Out of black sinners He can make bright saints. Hearts of stone He can take away, and give hearts of flesh. He can take the infidel, and create in him a mighty faith; the harlot, and make her a pattern of purity; the lowest of the low, and the vilest of the vile, and put them among the princes—even the princes of His people. Granted that a Christian is the result of a creation, then nothing is wanted to begin with, and no help is required in the process, the Lord can work, and none can hinder Him. This truth lifts the whole matter out of the region of the creature's merit, worth, or ability, and puts it on another footing, full of hope to man, and of glory to God. I would be glad and rejoice forever in that which God creates, it fills me with comfort for my fellow men, and with reverence for my God.

But the text speaks of this creation as "in Christ Jesus." This is a deeply instructive subject, which at this present time cannot fully be discussed, partly from lack of time, and partly from lack of ability on my part to fully open it up. It would require a series of discourses, such as Dr. John Owen, or Stephen Charnock might have been able to deliver, the theologians of today, if there are any, cannot come near it. Herein is a great deep—"created in Christ Jesus." This much, however, I may note, for it rises to the surface. In the first creation you and I were created in Adam. We wear the image of the earthly Adam by our natural descent, and as such we are the creatures of God. It is of our natural birth that the Psalmist

said, "Your hands have made me and fashioned me." Thus we received our being, and that is a blessing, but the blessing would have soured into a curse had not Jesus come to work our well-being. Creation in the first Adam has brought us into a world of misery, and to reach a better world we require to be created in some such fashion that we come into union, and connection, and relationship with the second Adam, the Lord from heaven. This is what the Lord does when He new-creates each believer; He creates him in Christ Jesus. The Lord Jesus is his federal Head, and his Representative, his hope is hidden in Him. We are thus put under a new economy, and are dealt with under a new system and order of things. I could tell you something more that I do believe, namely, that when the glorious Jehovah created the Christ, as the Man Christ Jesus, and when the Godhead came into union with this human nature of our blessed Lord, all of us were viewed as in Him. What says the Lord? "In Your book all My members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them." That God saw you, and me, and all the redeemed in Christ from all eternity, is a matter of faith to me, and we were in Christ when He died, in Him when He rose, and we are in Him even now that He sits at the right hand of God, even the Father. Who can separate the Head from the members, or the members from the Head? We are regarded as one in the thought and acts of Jehovah. Beloved, there is a mystic unity between Christ and the twice-born, into which I will not further go. I point to a case which just now I will not unlock. But to return to the text, here is the glory of it, first, we are God's workmanship, and the peculiar manner in which we have been created is that we have been created "in Christ Jesus."

III. We come, thirdly, to dwell upon THE SPECIAL OBJECTIVE OF THIS CREATION, "unto good works, which God has before ordained that we should walk in them."

When Adam was created, the Lord made him for His own glory. This always was, and is, and must be the chief end of man. As soon as he was created, the Lord placed Adam in the garden, and what did He give him to do? "He had only to enjoy himself," says one. I do not read such a statement in the Scriptures. "He put him there," says another, "that he might eat of every fruit that grew in the garden." Truly He did permit Adam freely to partake of all that nature yielded, but God tells us Himself that He put him in the garden "to dress it, and to keep it." Occupation was found him which would keep him always busy. A gardener's business is healthful and interesting, but it offers no temptation to idleness, for every season has its demands, and if the work is not kept well under, it is hard to overtake it again. That noble man, who was the founder of our race, trimmed the vine, and trained the tree, uprooted the weed, and planted the herb. Paradise itself required to make it perfect that a man should have something to do. Slavish drudgery involved by unreasonable hours is not of God, but of the cruel greed of man, ill-remunerated toil, by which the worker cannot earn his daily bread, is the result of human tyranny, not of divine purpose, but a fair share of healthy, useful labor is necessary for us all, and if ever this world becomes a paradise again, we shall have each one of us to pay either the sweat of our brow or of our brain as the price of our bread.

When the Lord creates us the second time, in the second Adam, He does not make us that we may be merely comfortable and happy. We may enjoy all that God has given us, for of every tree of this garden you may freely eat, since in the paradise into which Christ has introduced you, there is no forbidden fruit. You may eat and drink abundantly of heavenly food, but you are not created anew with so poor a purpose as your pleasure only. Around you is the garden of the Lord, and your call is that you may dress it, and keep it. Cultivate it within, guard it from foes without. Holy labors await you, good works are expected of you, and you were created in Christ Jesus on purpose that you might be zealous for them. To you the great Father says, "Son, go work today in My vineyard." He who died for you calls you to do works like His own. The Holy Spirit within you prompts you to consecration; urges you to diligence.

And what are good works? In that question lies another large subject. Tell me, you who talk so much of good works, what are they? I should say that they are works such as God commands—*works of obedience*. When we heartily keep the divine precepts, we must be right, for it can never be evil for a man to do what God bids him.

Next, I should say that they are *works of love,* of love to God, and love to man, works done out of a pure affection to the great Father, and out of unselfish regard to men. That which we do to display our own liberality is done unto self, and so is spoiled, but where there is a single eye to God's glory, the work is good. Works done out of love to Christ, and love to saints, love to the poor, and love to lost sinners, are good works.

Furthermore, I should say that *works of faith* are good works, works done in confidence in God, undertaken in reliance upon His help, and in the firm belief that He will accept them even though men

might censure them. The proclamation of His gospel with faith in its power, the pleading of the promise with expectation of its fulfillment, the sacrifice of personal gain for the service of truth—works such as these are good and pleasing to God, for without faith it is impossible to please Him.

I am bound to add that good works include the necessary *acts of common life* when they are rightly performed. We are to produce good works in our home, in our shop, in our workplace, in our travel abroad, or on our sickbed, everywhere we are to be filled with good works to God's glory. All our works should be good works, and we may make them so by sanctifying them with the Word of God and prayer, according to that precept, "Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus."

Observe that God has not created us that we may *talk* about our good works, but that we may *walk in them*. Practical doing is better than loud boasting. God has not created us that we may occasionally perform good works, but that we may walk in them—that they may be so habitual to us that the common course of our conversation may be full of them. God has not created us that we may execute good works as a grand performance, but that we may walk in them, not that we may jump up to them, or seem to be walking on stilts, and making a great display every now and then, but that easily, naturally, out of a fully renewed heart, our new-created spirit may display itself in good works. May God grant that His holy objective may be carried out in us to such a degree that our path may be luminous with holiness, that we may leave behind a shining track, like that of a vessel upon the sea! Oh, that our way may be strewn with gracious acts, as when a cloud shines over a thirsty land, and blesses it with silver showers! I have known in a certain village a spot called "The Poet's Walk," and another called "The Lovers' Walk." Oh, that ours may be, "The Christian's Walk"! May the good Lord perfect us in every good work to do His will, working in us that which is well-pleasing in His sight!

IV. And now I close with this last head. Fourthly, THE REMARKABLE PREPARATION MADE FOR THAT OBJECTIVE, for so the text may be rendered, "which God has prepared that we should walk in them."

God has decreed the salvation of His people, but do not accept that statement as it is at times delivered, but clearly understand what it means. The Lord has decreed everything, and He has as much *decreed the holy lives of His people* as He has decreed their ultimate glorification with Him in heaven. Concerning good works, "He has before ordained that we should walk in them." If God has really and of a truth met with you in a way of grace, and worked upon you by His Spirit, and new-created you, then take it for certain that you are ordained to be a prayerful, godly, upright, sanctified man. The purpose is one and indivisible, there is no ordination to salvation apart from sanctification. The Lord has not ordained any man to eternal life with the proviso that he may continue in sin. No, but He has ordained him that he shall become a new creature in Christ Jesus, and then shall forsake his evil ways, and walk in good works until that walk shall end in perfection before the eternal throne. Understand, then, that the walk of a Christian man is predestinated of God, as much as the safety of a Christian, and so we, whom He has predestinated, are as eager to fulfill our holy destiny here as to enjoy our heavenly destiny hereafter. Foreordination to holiness is indissolubly joined to foreordination to happiness. Note *that*. Thus, in the eternal purpose due provision is made for the good works of believers.

But, next, God has *personally prepared every Christian for good works*. "Oh," some say, "I sometimes feel as if I am so unfit for God's service." You are not unfit, so far as you are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works. When God creates a bird to fly, it is the best flying-machine that can be manufactured, indeed, none can equal it. If God creates worms to plow the soil, and bring up the more useful ingredients to the surface, they are the best fertilizers under heaven. God's purpose is subserved by that which He makes, else were He an unwise worker. We are in a special degree God's workmanship, created to this end that we may produce good works, and we are fitted to that end as much as a bird is fitted to fly, or a worm is fitted for its purpose in the earth.

"Oh," says one, "but I find it so difficult to walk in good works." Then you are not your true and real self. Pray God to put the flesh back, and to let that dead and carnal part of you be gone, and ask that the new life, which He has infused, may have good scope to carry out its own natural instincts, for it is a holy thing, created on purpose to walk in good works, and it will do so if it is not hindered. Give it liberty. Give it opportunity. Feed it. Bring it before God to strengthen it, and it must, it will, as certainly produce good works as a good tree brings forth good fruit. Spontaneous holiness comes forth from sincere piety. A pure fountain yields clear streams, it cannot do otherwise. The new nature cannot sin because it is born of God. He that has a clean heart will necessarily have clean hands. An impure sea casts up mire

and dirt, but the river of the water of life, when it overflows its banks, deposits no mud, but it leaves sand of gold behind it.

Once more, observe with content that *everything around you is arranged for the production of good works in you*. "I do not see that," says one. But listen. When God made Adam, when did He make him? He did not create him till He had made a place for him to live in. The great Father's dear child could not be created until the garden had its roses blooming and its fruits ripening for him, that he might be delighted with them. When the Lord God created you in Christ Jesus, as you believe He did, He had prepared for you a position of service and usefulness, exactly fitted for your capacity. That place for the present is the position which you now occupy. "No," says one, "but I am in the place of poverty." That is it; it is God's design that you may in that place produce the sweet fruits of contentment and patience. "Alas!" cries another, "I dwell among the ungodly." It is intended by your Lord that your light may shine among them, and that you, having your graces tried, may become all the stronger and the better man. "Oh," says one, "I am a Christian, but I believe that I am in the worst place that ever was. I am alone, like a plant in the desert." Is it not written, "The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose"? Full often the most advantageous place for our manhood is that which is surrounded with splendid difficulties. A soldier is trained by battles and a mariner by storms. What can a man do when he has everything to his hand? Everything is possible to him, but so it is to every simpleton. He is truly a man who has nothing to assist him, and yet is aided by the opposition which confronts him. To sail against wind and tide would be more notable than to drift with gale and current. Is not he a true man who can turn to account the worst possible circumstances so as to produce the best possible results? He has an opportunity for distinguishing himself who is placed amid temptations and perils. In your life, good works are provided for—"God has before prepared that we should walk in them."

On the whole, you are placed in the best position for your producing good works to the glory of God. "I do not think it," says one. Very well, then you will worry to quit your position, and attain another footing, mind that you do not plunge into a worse. The wise man says, "As a bird that wanders from her nest, so is a man that wanders from his place." It is not the box that makes the jewel, nor the place that makes the man. "Oh, but anywhere rather than this!" Yes, and when you get into the place you now covet, you will pine to be back again. A barren tree is none the better for being transplanted. A blind man may stand at many windows before he will improve his view. If it is difficult to produce good works where you are, you will find it still difficult where you wish to be. He, who said that he leaped so many yards at Rhodes, was asked to do the same feat at home; surely the place could not take away his strength, nor give it to him.

Oh, sirs, the real difficulty lies not without you, but within you. If you get more grace, and are more fully God's workmanship, you can glorify Him in Babylon as well as in Jerusalem. Were you placed within the outskirts of perdition, you would glorify God if God has sanctified you. If you were called to walk through Pandemonium, you would startle it with a message from the Most High if the Spirit of God is truly within you. Your present possibilities are the best for this present, use them as they fly. At any rate, rest assured that divine wisdom has not only prepared you for the hour, but the hour for you. All things are in a divine sense, your friends, "For you shall be in league with the stones of the field: and the beasts of the field shall be at peace with you."

Moreover, *the Lord has prepared the whole system of His grace to this end*—that you should abound in good works. Every part and portion of the economy of grace tends toward this result, that you may be perfect even as Your Father in heaven is perfect. I long to be holy, the Holy Spirit is given to be my Sanctifier. I desire to live near to God, the Holy Spirit dwells in me, and this is nearness of the highest order. Did I hear you sigh—"I pine to know more of God"? This precious Book is in your hand, and its Author is among us, ready to expound it to you. "Oh, but I agonize to conquer sin!" This is not denied you, for it is written, "This is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith." Another says, "I yearn to be more like Christ." You are taken into communion with Christ on purpose that this may be. Looking at Him you are changed into His image, from glory unto glory. Everything needful for your holiness is to your hand in the covenant of grace. All the helps that you need in your pilgrim way are already placed along the sacred road. The Lord, in the Scriptural sense of the word, *"prevents"* you with the blessings of His goodness. All events, whether terrible or joyous, shall be made to work together for this highest form of good, namely, your sanctification. January's snow, February's cold, April showers, March winds, and July suns, all co-operate to prepare the wheat for the garner, and all earthly changes

are sent of God to ripen us for the eternal future. Yes, I may even say that the glories of heaven call us to a sublime life of holiness, and the thunders of hell urge us to conquer the temptations which are in the world through lust. The crown which Christ holds over our heads inspires us with ardor in our race, while the cross on which He died stirs us to a fervent enthusiasm for His praise. Nothing in heaven, or on earth, or in hell, rightly used, will excuse us in lukewarmness, but everything will impel us to intense zeal for holiness. Even the sin, which so sadly abounds around us, should make us the more watchful and careful in life. When dung is laid to the roots of the vine, it is not thereby defiled, but even out of the foul decay it finds nutriment with which to swell its delicious clusters, thus, even the wickedness of man, by driving us nearer to our God, should prove a motive-power for producing more exemplary lives in the midst of an untoward generation. Oh, sirs, if God calls you His workmanship, take care that none can justly find fault with the Worker! If you are indeed God's creation in Christ Jesus, take care that none despise the second birth, or the second Adam. And if it is so, that the Lord has before prepared all things that we may walk in good works, let us get into gear with creation, let us be in harmony with providence, let us keep step with the march of God's purpose. What more shall I say? I will only breathe a wish. Oh, that you who have not yet believed in my Lord Jesus would do so now, for "to as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name"! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—EPHESIANS 2.
HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—181, 287, 222.

LETTER FROM MR. SPURGEON:

DEAR FRIENDS—I shall be right glad when the weekly sermon will be that preached in my own pulpit on the previous Sabbath, and I hope that such will be the case in two or three weeks. Still I think the present sermon is somewhat better than those of an ordinary Sunday morning, certainly I enjoyed it much in preparing it for the press, and I send it forth very hopefully, believing that God will feed His people thereby.

I cannot say that I am quite well, but I am progressing upon the whole, and feel much rested and refreshed. Pray that I may soon get to work, and may do so under a double anointing of the Spirit of God.

I heartily thank some few friends who have sent help to Evangelists and Colportage, and I would not forget those who mean to do so soon.

Yours ever heartily,
C. H. Spurgeon.
Mentone, March 14, 1885.

Adapted from *The C. H. Spurgeon Collection*, Version 1.0, Ages Software.

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