

We Are All God's Handiwork

- ✦ unclean by nature (v.6)
- ✦ disciplined in mercy (v.7)
- ✦ formed by loving skill (v.8)

In the name of Christ Jesus our Savior who has come and is coming again, dearly redeemed:

Would this be irritating? Your husband keeps going to your church, but when you complain, he says you ought to come too. Or maybe your husband is upset because the preacher seems to be talking just to him. You try to explain the message is meant for everyone, but he just doesn't get it. Your friends went to the same Catechism class you did, but somehow they insist the pastor never said it's wrong to live together or enjoy the blessings of marriage before you're married. So why are things that taste so good and feel so good so bad for you? *Pastor, I was just fine before you started talking about all that stuff!* Feeling some righteous indignation? *We go to church together. We followed God's will in our romance and marriage. I just don't understand why others are so hard headed and ignorant!* Oops! How quickly we slip into work-righteousness. Church people told the prophets, **"Stop confronting us with the Holy One of Israel!"** (Isaiah 30:11) Sadly, there's a blind, deaf, dumb and really stupid side of all of us that's not much better than mud on the floor. But here's an encouraging word. God knows just what to do with us to make us useful and blessed. **We Are All God's Handiwork.** Change my heart, O Lord...

✦ unclean by nature (v.6)

Ask any pastor at least ten years in the ministry if he ever had a time he was sure he did not deserve this privilege. There are moments when theory becomes painfully real. We have this ministry by mercy, not by merit. Maybe you recall the light switching on: *I just don't deserve to be a Christian. God has been so good to me, but I don't deserve even the least of all His mercy and faithfulness!*

A Seminary professor once told a chapel assembly of future pastors, "Let's face it, guys. The reason none of you ever fell into the sin of adultery like David is that no Bathsheba ever wanted you. You're just not that good looking" – or powerful, wealthy and prestigious. Could it be that God withholds blessings from us because He knows they would get us into trouble? King David was the "sweet psalmist of Israel." But when he stayed behind in Jerusalem one spring instead of going off to fight the Lord's battles, he committed adultery, murder, treachery – sins that never left his family. He discovered the **unclean by nature** reality of how far each of us can fall, in spite of so many advantages.

This was not just religious theory when the Holy Spirit a few centuries later inspired Isaiah to write: **"All of us have become like something unclean, and all our righteous acts are like a filthy cloth. All of us have withered like a leaf, and our guilt carries us away like the wind."** (Isaiah 64:6 EHV¹) Some of you are very aware that when the EHV translates **"filthy cloth,"** the literal meaning has to go in a footnote for little ears not to hear how gross and disgusting our sins really are. But don't miss the point. That's on our best days, doing the best we ever could. **Our guilt** carrying us away like the wind is a debt of **guilt** we owed as soon as we were conceived. When this reality finally smashed David's pride, he had to write: **"Certainly, I was guilty when I was born. I was sinful when my mother conceived me."** (Psalm 51:5) A similar sounding word for the Hebrew **"sinful"** is our word *hate*. No one has to teach us. It's not our environment. Don't blame your parents, teachers or the government. We are all **Unclean by nature.**

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✦ disciplined in mercy (v.7)

With an evil father Ahaz and a despicable son Manasseh, the twenty-nine year rule of good King Hezekiah was a bright spot in Isaiah's forty-year ministry. Hezekiah worked hard to restore the temple in Jerusalem and to teach the people to worship the LORD faithfully. Offerings were way up. The Passover was celebrated like not since Solomon the son of David. Skilled leadership, but then: ***"After all that Hezekiah had so faithfully done, Sennacherib king of Assyria came and invaded Judah. He laid siege to the fortified cities, thinking to conquer them for himself."*** (2 Chronicles 32:1 NIV84) Such cruelties of Assyria – ripping open pregnant women, piling heads of officials on both sides of city gates for refusing to open, bragging stone monuments that still shout defiance of God to this day. Years of hardship mark the archeological record, poor harvests, near starvation. Through it all Hezekiah and Isaiah teamed up with God's Word to encourage fortifying the cities, digging Hezekiah's famous tunnel to bring water into Jerusalem. The braggart King of Assyria, Sennacharib, lost his army of 185,000 men, wiped out overnight by the angel of the LORD. Sennacharib made it back to Assyria, but then was assassinated in the temple of his own god by two of his own sons who escaped unharmed. (2 Kings 19:35ff)

Do you ask, *Why? Such a good King Hezekiah – yet so much trouble?* Here's the LORD's answer through Isaiah: ***"There is no one who calls on your name, who rouses himself to take hold of you. So you hid your face from us. You made us melt by the power of our guilt."*** (Isaiah 64:7 EHV) Hezekiah too needed to be **disciplined in mercy**. God surgically removes our bad to give us His good. Before God can make us alive, He has to kill us. Before God can lift us up, He has to tear us down. Before God can bless us, He has to teach us what life is like without Him. We are **disciplined in mercy** because ***"the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and scourges in painful punishment every son whom he receives."*** (Hebrews 12:6 TPA) **Disciplined in mercy** – it cannot be otherwise. ***"God disciplines us for our good, so that we may share in his holiness."*** This is what it takes to prepare us for the Advent of King Jesus.

✦ formed by loving skill (v.8)

"Without holiness no one will see the Lord." (Hebrews 12:14 NIV84) Not with joy anyway. The Holy Spirit cries through John: ***"Look, he is coming with clouds, and every eye will see him, including those who pierced him. And all the nations of the earth will mourn because of him. Yes. Amen."*** (Revelation 1:7 EHV) When the Holy Spirit brought you to faith through Word and water, He created in you a new nature. Your New Man loves God and sincerely cares for your neighbor. But this side of eternity we are still only the children of God by faith in Jesus, still growing up to maturity.

Constantly we cry out with Isaiah, ***"But now, LORD, you are our father. We are the clay, and you are our potter. All of us are the work of your hand."*** (Isaiah 64:8) Earlier Isaiah prophesied: ***"Woe to anyone who argues against the potter who formed him. He is just a potsherd among the broken pieces of pottery on the ground. Does clay say to its potter, 'What are you making? Your work looks like something made by a potter with no hands?'"*** The LORD was forming His chosen nation of Israel through trials...captivity...release by ***"his anointed one...Cyrus...though you do not know me."*** (45:1-9)

Formed by loving skill – Does it work? Another servant of the Lord demonstrates in the last of his thirteen letters. Facing martyrdom, the Lord's Apostle Paul wrote to Pastor Timothy: ***"Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, a descendant of David, in accordance with my gospel, for which I am suffering, even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But the word of God is not chained. For this reason I endure all things for the sake of the elect, so that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, along with eternal glory."*** ***"I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight; I have finished the race; I have kept the faith. From now on, there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness. The Lord, the righteous Judge, will give it to me on that day, and not only to me but also to everyone who loved his appearing."*** (2 Timothy 2:8-10; 4:6-8) Thanks to be to God! Because **We Are All God's Handiwork**, we too long for the Advent of our King. ***"Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!"*** (Revelation 22:20) Amen.

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