

I like to have a nice embroidered tablecloth on my kitchen table. It is for decorative purposes only and I remove it at mealtimes.

When a friend went abroad for a holiday, he brought me back a gift of a most beautiful stumpwork tablecloth. (Stumpwork is when the embroidery is done with ribbon instead of embroidery silks.) He had gone to a great deal of trouble to choose something for me that would be arty/crafty and that I would really appreciate. In fact, I was told later, that he practically had every tablecloth in the shop on the counter before making a final choice!



I was actually gardening when I was given this gift so naturally my hands were quite dirty. Much to my amusement, (Although I did not dare show it at the time!) I was not allowed to touch the tablecloth. It was held for me whilst I had a good look at it and then he carefully folded it up and put it back into the packaging to keep it clean.

The thing that struck me most as I was given this lovely gift, was the big smile that accompanied it and his look of absolute pleasure when he saw my reaction. As I was looking at the cloth the other day, these thoughts were going over in my mind and it caused me to think about God and His creation. When we read the first chapter of Genesis in the Bible, telling us about the creation, each time God had made something it says, '*God saw that it was good.*' After He had created man however, it says, '*God saw that it was **very** good.*' He designed everything we can think of and yet our mighty, powerful God took more pleasure in creating a person. How good is that! We are more important to Him than all of the animals, flowers and galaxies etc., that He has produced and I can imagine Him smiling and looking at us with so much pleasure because He has made, not only wonderful people, but people who will commune with Him and have a relationship with Him.



Unfortunately, the analogy with the stumpwork tablecloth ends there. God does not put us back into the packaging to keep us clean, but leaves us free to decide how we are to live our lives. When we have children we are able to bring them up to the best of our abilities, yet there comes a time when we have to allow them to live their own lives and make their own choices – even if we do not agree with those choices. God does the same thing with each of us. He laid down basic rules for us many years ago and Jesus Himself enlarged on them whilst He was on this earth, but, He leaves us free to choose whether or not we will go along with His wishes.

100%

CLEAN

IMPOSSIBLE !

However hard we try, not one of us is able to keep our lives 100% 'clean'. It must cause God to be really sad, especially as He felt that making man was '**VERY GOOD**'. There came a point very early on when God was fed-up with the way in which folk were living their lives and I think that one of the saddest verses in the Bible is, '*The Lord was sorry that he had made man on the earth and it grieved Him to His heart.*' (Genesis 6:6) Not just sad, but a deep grief because His requests were being ignored.

I try desperately not to grieve God, but none of us can completely succeed in doing that, no matter how hard we try, because of our innate human nature. It is an impossible task for us to keep ourselves 'clean' outside of God's packaging. The good news though, is that God knew what we would be like - even before He gave life to each one of us – so He has made a way for us to get back on track again each time we step off the road.

When Jesus died on the cross he was apologizing to God on behalf of each one of us. Here are some of the sort of prayers that Jesus might be praying for us:-

Father God, I am sorry that ..... did this; please forgive him.

*Father God, I am sorry .....spoke like that; please forgive her.*

I want to make lives clean again in Your eyes.

*Your beautifully created people, that gave You so much pleasure to design – I am sorry that they are grieving You deeply.*

I take the punishment for each and every person – millions and millions, all down the ages.

*I did not want to go through with this, but this is the way that You have chosen to make lives 'clean' and to bring them back into a right relationship with Yourself.*

You do not put them back into the packaging to keep them 'clean' but I was willing to do what was necessary to achieve that.

*Father God, I take the place of them all to bring them back to You.*

Father, forgive them.

There is an old hymn that goes like this:-

*Jesus died on the cross for me*

*Yes he died on the cross for me*

*'Twas for me He died, was crucified*

*Jesus died on the cross for me.*



We are more intricately made than any stumpwork tablecloth. Although we are basically all made up of similar bits and pieces, God is pleased to see His unique design for each one of us unfold as He gives us breath to live our lives as He intended.

***'The Lord takes pleasure in His people'***

Psalm 149: 4