

“Holy and Blameless”
Ephesians 1:1-4
(Preached at Trinity, October 13, 2013)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. As I pointed out last time, Paul begins this letter in a way similar with all of his letters. There was a standard formula used in 1st century letters: author, recipient, greeting. But in Paul's letters we should not skip over the salutation as mere formality. Paul doesn't waste words. He often reveals important theological truths from the beginning of his letters.
 2. As Paul opens the Book of Ephesians Paul describes his recipients in a particular way: "To the saints who are at Ephesus and *who are faithful* in Christ Jesus"
 - A. He uses two particular adjectives to describe them - ἅγιος and πιστός. These two words are at the heart of Biblical Christianity: holy and faithful.
 - B. Paul wasn't writing to a particular class of Christians or a higher order of Christians. He was just writing to Christians, ordinary church members. He wasn't writing of what they could hope to become but what they were. And he uses these two terms to describe them. These two terms describe what it means to be a Christian.
 3. Last time we limited our focus to the second of these two words - πιστός – “faithful” Paul uses it to refer to the “believing ones” and the effect of their belief upon their lives – they are faithful, reliable, dependable, loyal, steadfast, trustworthy. They do not give in to compromise easily.
 4. This morning I want to zero in on the other word Paul uses to describe the Christian - ἅγιος, This morning we'll also enter into the body of the Epistle. In **Verse 4** Paul uses the same word. He says that this word is at the heart of God's purpose in saving His people.
Ephesians 1:4 NAU - "He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy (ἅγιος) and blameless before Him. "
- I. The Christian is holy – What does it mean that the Christian is holy?
- A. In **Verse 1** Paul refers to these Ephesian Christians as “saints.”
 1. Our English translation comes from the Latin word *sanctus*. Roman Catholicism has done much to greatly pervert this word.
 - a. The RC church teaches that saints are a different sort of Christian—a higher class. A person must be canonized as a saint.
 - b. The process of canonization is a lengthy process.
 - The candidate is no longer living – his life has to be one of consistent virtue.
 - He has to have done wonderful works and there has to be at least two miracles attributed to him.

- Only then is he or she canonized by the church.
 - c. Some of these are so venerated by the church that prayers are offered up to them.
 - 2. The Bible declares all Christians to be saints – Over 60 times in the NT. The Greek word is ἅγιος – it simply means holy. It is a word used to define Christians. They are holy.
- B. In its basic sense, holy means “set apart”
1. This is true of the nature of God – He is holy, holy, holy
 - a. God is wholly other. He is set apart from creation, independent and solitary. He is self-existent. His being is in Himself. He is the great I AM. He is infinite in all of His divine being.
 - b. God is also set apart from all that is defiled. He dwells in infinite purity
 2. The Christian is also set apart. He is holy.
How is it that the Christian is set apart?
- II. The first thing ἅγιος means is set apart as belonging to God – God’s possession
- A. Under the Old Covenant God’s people were set apart
1. Israel was chosen as a holy nation—a nation set apart from among all the nations of the earth. God entered into a covenant relationship with them. They were God’s own possession.
 2. Circumcision marked God’s covenant people as being distinct, holy—God’s own people set apart from all the nations of the earth.
 3. Circumcision was a mark of obedience signifying trust in God’s covenant. It marked their full submission to God.
It was permanent and irreversible
 4. The other nations mocked and ridiculed Israel for such foolishness. Circumcision confounded the wisdom of the flesh – yet, it was pleasing to God. God demanded that His people be different.
 5. The problem was it was only an outward mark upon them. Circumcision did not affect the heart. God demands that His people love and obey Him with their whole heart.
God was more interested in circumcised hearts
Deuteronomy 10:16 – “Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiffnecked.”
- B. The glory of the New Covenant is God promises to make His people holy in heart
Deuteronomy 30:6 – “And the LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live.”
Jeremiah 32:40 NAU - "I will make an everlasting covenant with them that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; and I will put the fear of Me in their hearts so that they will not turn away from Me."
1. In the New Covenant God still demands absolute separation from us – that we be holy, consecrated unto Him—but He has given us new hearts that enable us to be faithful to Him.

2. In the New Covenant we find the ultimate expression of God's covenant people. They are described as chosen, holy, God's own possession.
1 Peter 2:9-10 NAS - "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; ¹⁰ for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."
3. God still demands that His people bear His mark.
 - a. Under the Old Covenant all of the men in Israel were circumcised
It was permanent and irreversible
 - b. Under the New Covenant God places His mark of holiness upon His people which is also permanent and irreversible
4. There are two aspects of this holiness
 - a. First there is positional holiness. The righteousness of Christ has been imputed to us through justification. We bear His holiness. This is described in **verse 4** by the word "blameless."
 - b. But we are also characterized by practical holiness – a progressive separation from sin.
 - c. This is possible through the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Holiness who works in us that we might be holy.

III. As God's people ἅγιος means we are set apart from all that is defiled – it means a separation from sin.

- A. Sin has greatly defiled humanity
 1. Paul describes our dreadful condition in **Chapter 2**
Ephesians 2:1-3 NAU - "And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, ² in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. ³ Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest."
 2. At the heart of God's redemptive purpose is restoration and reconciliation.
- B. God's point in our salvation is that we would be holy.
Ephesians 1:4 NAU - "He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy"
Ephesians 5:27 NAU - "that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless."
 1. The great majority of the NT is made up of the Epistles which focus primarily on one thing: holiness and mortification of the flesh
Romans 8:13 - "For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live."
Colossians 3:5 - "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth"
Ephesians 5:8 NAU - "you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light"

2. As the people of God we must give ourselves to the pursuit of holiness; of fleeing from all that is contrary to God's Law; of avoiding all that does not glorify God.
 3. Holiness must become our chief business. We must train ourselves to that end.
I Timothy 4:7-8 - "Exercise thyself rather unto godliness. For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of life that now is, and of that which is to come."
 4. There is a great distinction between the believer and the unbeliever
 We are in two different worlds – two different kingdoms.
 Our attitudes, beliefs, goals, motives – all are different
 Holiness is not some vague abstract. It is at the heart of Christianity.
 5. For the Christian his greatest desire is to be conformed to the righteousness of Christ.
- B. Does your salvation depend upon you attaining to some degree of holiness?
 Yes and no – Scripture teaches both
1. On one hand, no amount of our works or self-righteousness can merit our salvation.
 - a. You don't have to make yourself righteous before coming to Christ. The Gospel is for sinners.
Mark 2:17 NAU - "Jesus said to them, "*It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick; I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners.*"
 - b. Salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in the merits of Christ alone.
Titus 3:5 NAS - "He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit,"
 - c. There is nothing we can do to merit anything from God. You cannot earn God's favor. You can only receive what He has freely given.
Isaiah 55:1-3 NAS - "Ho! Every one who thirsts, come to the waters; And you who have no money come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk Without money and without cost. ² "Why do you spend money for what is not bread, And your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, And delight yourself in abundance. ³ "Incline your ear and come to Me. Listen, that you may live; And I will make an everlasting covenant with you"
 - d. This is the nature of justification – the imputed righteousness of Christ. It is all of Christ. You can do nothing to earn it.
 - e. In Christ you become blameless, spotless, without blemish.
 This is the meaning of the word "blameless" in **Verse 4**

2. On the other hand, the Christian is marked by consistent holiness – the mark of regeneration
 - a. Salvation demands repentance. It demands submission to Christ, of turning our wills over to Him. God will not allow us to have competing allegiances. He says serve Him—alone. This is at the heart of the 1st Commandment.
 - b. God has always demanded that His people give Him undivided allegiance. **See Deut. 13:1-11**
 - c. Under the Old Covenant an uncircumcised man was cut off from the people of God.
Without the mark of regeneration today a man is cut off from the people of God. What is the mark of regeneration? It is holiness.
 - d. Jesus made this clear
Matthew 7:19-21 NAS - "Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰ "So then, you will know them by their fruits. ²¹ "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven."
 - e. Although we have been declared holy and blameless through the work of Christ we are also commanded to strive after holiness – to be consecrated or set apart unto God – to be holy.
 - f. One of the great marks of regeneration is that we have a great desire for holiness. We have a great desire to please Christ. We have an insatiable appetite for Him.

Conclusion:

1. Let me stress again the progressive nature of God's work of holiness in us. Although we are saved unto holiness and have been declared blameless in Christ our growth in holiness is a lifelong work of grace.
2 Corinthians 4:16-17 – "Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison,"
2. This is the contrast between justification and sanctification. In justification we are declared holy. It is God's finished work of grace in us in Christ. We are now blameless, perfect in Christ Jesus.
But there is a difference between our position of holiness in Christ and our actual practical holiness. We are being made holy; an ongoing process of grace.
3. While the work of being made holy is a supernatural work, we are very much involved in the process. He has given us a new heart, a holy appetite, a desire to please Him. Through the Holy Spirit dwelling in us we labor hard at the work of mortifying sin, denying our flesh, resisting Satan's lies and temptations, remaining separate from the world, and giving ourselves to God's appointed means of grace—prayer, His Word, and the sacraments.
4. This is why the local church is so important. We watch over one another and encourage one another.

5. The Christian is the one very much interested in this process.
We have assurance of His work of grace in us, trusting in the merits of Christ. We press on in the process of being made holy.
Our motivation for this labor is our passionate love for Christ.
The Christian life is about holy appetites.
Jesus said,
Matthew 5:6 NAU - "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied."
6. Does Paul's description of a Christian describe you? Are you holy and faithful.