

## Holiness

### Text: Eph 4:17-32

Good morning everyone - as you know in recent weeks we have been looking at the Holy Spirit and spiritual gifts and just as a brief recap you may remember we said a few weeks ago about how important the person of the Holy Spirit was and the transforming power He brings to our lives.

I recounted the story of Pentecost. Where the Holy Spirit had come on the believers after Jesus had been raised from the dead and had ascended into heaven. They had been told to wait, to do nothing but wait for the Holy Spirit.

And we were saying from the experience at Pentecost, there is an important lesson here for us, and it is: You cannot live as a Christian without the Holy Spirit's presence and the power He brings. You are incomplete – partial - deficient.

As Edwin said last week to experience the Holy Spirit and spiritual gifts in your life - the essential requirement is you have to be '*born again*' - he gave the example of it being like a car without fuel that's not able to function or to go anywhere.

We also said the need for us to operate in the spiritual gifts. I said God had given them to us almost like divine endowments, these gifts (and I say it reverently) are like a down payment from God: Jesus has sat down at God's right side and he has sent these gifts through the Holy Spirit almost as an insurance policy - an endowment until we see him face to face where we will receive our full inheritance.

But this morning I want to continue on this subject but look at the *fruits of the Spirit* as this is also the subject that came up in the Bible study on Monday '*back to basics*.' We had already covered in our Bible study in previous weeks the subjects 'does God exist' and looked at the overwhelming evidence He does – We had also looked at the story of Nicodemus and the need to be 'born again.'

This week we had come to the subject heading of '*living for Christ*' and I said to the group this is where the '*rubber hits the road*' where we had to '*walk the walk*' and live out our Christian lives faithfully and obediently. We said it wasn't easy, as we faced opposition from ourselves that's the old nature that remains within us, but also that we had to contend with Satan, spiritual warfare and the 'World' and its principles, values and beliefs. But also emphasizing that God gives us everything we need to live out a Holy life.

The term used for '*living out*' or '*putting into practice*' this Christian life is called '*sanctification*' and what it means is "*to be set apart*" or "*to be made holy*" but in a nutshell it is God changing us from the inside, dealing with our old habits and desires and making us more like Jesus and this again is through the work of the Holy Spirit who lives within us.

The pursuit of holiness does not end when we come to Christ. In fact, it just begins! Can I at this point, point out the difference between justification (that is what happens when we are saved) and what we are talking about this morning, that is being sanctified – becoming holy.

**Justification** – is forgiveness, the clearing of all of my guilt and the deserved penalty for my sins, through faith in Jesus Christ, who took on the penalty for my sins and paid the price by dying in my place and taking my punishment on the cross.

The truth is just as much we do not play a part in our first birth our natural birth! likewise we do not play a part in our second birth, being born again as it is something essentially done to us, we just accept Jesus Christ into our lives in faith based on what he has already done, chosen us to come to him before we were even born.

It's a different matter regarding **Sanctification** – This is the result of salvation. This is the ongoing transformation from the old sinful patterns of behaviour to being made more Christ like. This is a process we undergo throughout our lifetime as Christians, as we in obedience to the Spirit, put off the works of the flesh and take on the fruit of the Spirit. It's working in co-operation with God. You could say it was a dual activity between God and us.

And before I go on - can I say regarding this subject we are all in process I wouldn't want you to think that I stand up here having arrived! Or being more holy than you! it couldn't be further from the truth, In fact many of the things I say this morning I am still looking to appropriate myself, and seeking that reality in my own life - but that does should not dilute what I am saying.

I hope I am ready to learn and you would point out my error if you see it - but I do believe through my own personal study, in what I have read and experienced and hopefully guided by the Spirit - that to the best of my understanding (at this time) this is Gods way, as stated in the scriptures, of making us holy.

So we are looking today at how we change, how we grow, how we become more holy as a Christian. The truth is we can't stay the same, we have to change, we can't stand still and firstly we have to say that it is Gods desire for us to be Holy.

The Bible could not be any clearer, the reason for your entire salvation, the motive behind your creation, the purpose for which God chose you in the first place - **is holiness**. Do you want to know Gods will for your life - read 2 Tim 1.9 "*He has saved us and called us to a holy life?*" 1 Thessalonians 4:3 "*It is God's will that you should be holy - sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality*";

You may get confused at times whether God wants you to do, is it this or that? In fact we can tie ourselves up in knots by trying to find God's will for our lives, but here in scripture it is clear and plain as the nose on your face! The most important, the primary, purpose God has for you **is to be holy**.

Before we go any further I just want to mention a couple errors when we talk about holiness, that people can fall into – firstly it's not for some special breed of saint! *'The elite' - only for the 'super Christian'!*

Some people may admire holiness in other people, and wish that they themselves were like them. They seem to suppose that those who grow - grow by some special gift or anointing from God, and that as this gift is not granted to them they must be content to sit still. But that is not the case! We are all called to be holy and each of us, has within us the potential for growth.

But secondly at the other end of the scale, I do not mean perfection in this life. I do not see any scriptural evidence for complete holiness and if you look at the life of the greatest saints the closer they got to God the more aware of their failings and their unworthiness they became.

We know that the *'power & penalty'* for sin is taken care of at the cross but the *'presence'* of sin remains within us and it is something we will always contend with this side of heaven, at the same time that should not stop us from aiming for the highest level of holiness we can attain.

But what does sanctification – this process of becoming holy practically mean. Well if we want to keep it simple (as the bible does) it means in a nutshell what *John the Baptist* said about Jesus in the gospel of John. *John the Baptist* had a great reputation, people would come from miles to hear what he said, to be baptized by him, but when Jesus came on the scene he had to step back and let Jesus, the *Son of God* take over, take a more prominent place.

He said this in John 3:30 *"He must become greater I must become less"* – or *"He must increase I must decrease"* and that is the process of becoming more holy, the life of Jesus within us should grow, become more and more in our lives, it should increase and the old life of ours becomes less & less, it should diminish. (And it has similarities when Jesus comes into our own lives)

We must seek the place where Apostle Paul arrived at towards the end of his Christian journey, where he could say *"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me"*

Doesn't mean we lose our personality, we are all unique and that life of Christ within expresses itself in different ways in each of us, but it does mean we should be growing in these things, the fruits mentioned in (Galatians 5:22-23) *"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,<sup>23</sup> gentleness and self-control"*

And we should take stock at times and ask if we are really growing in these fruits? year in year out (as I did this week - I have grown in knowledge - but how much have I grown in these fruits? Love joy peace patience.... etc surely this is the acid test.

There are many warnings in scriptures and the reason for that is: there is always a potential we may go off track! That is anyone of us! We have to be transparent; open to the Spirit to convict us - when we think we have arrived we are in trouble.

And one of the warnings is this mismatch between knowing something but not doing it - between the theory and the practise.

James says this *“Be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. for if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his face in a mirror; <sup>24</sup> he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was.”*

JC Ryle goes further and says: *“Sound Protestant and Evangelical doctrine is useless if it is not accompanied by a holy life. It is worse than useless: it does positive harm. It is despised by keen -sighted and shrewd men of the world, as an unreal and hollow thing, and brings religion into contempt”*

You see Paul says in that great passage on love in 1 Corinthians 13 *“without Love I am nothing”* – it’s pointless if love isn’t motivating us! So how does that life of Christ grow within us? How do we become holy? Firstly we have to **be intentional** we must actively pursue it!

*“But we know that when he appears we shall be like him because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who has this hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure” (1 John 3:1-3)*

Everyone who has that hope of Christ inside them – purifies themselves! That is they make every effort to be holy. I have said it before there is no room for passiveness – ‘let go let God’ if you ‘let go let God’ in the area of becoming holy you will quickly slip down, that is, disappear into ineffectiveness, become a bland unfruitful Christian. We work in co- operation with the Holy Spirit in sanctification. We “work out” what God “works in” us.

And it is made clear to us! The Bible tells us exactly how to be holy, what you have to do! You will find throughout the NT - this principle of *putting off the old and putting on the new*, it is everywhere, and the teaching is at the heart and soul of becoming holy.

Colossians 3:9-10

*Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him”*

Ephesians 4:22-24

*“ In reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth”*

Let me read you this from Paul's letter to the Galatians:-

*"The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery;<sup>20</sup> idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions<sup>21</sup> and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God."*

*"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.<sup>24</sup> Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.<sup>25</sup> Since we live by the Spirit let us keep in step with the Spirit.<sup>26</sup> Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other."*

Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. God doesn't crucify them for you – you have to do it!

Throughout scripture is this contrast this great divide between light and darkness, the wrong way to live and the right way to live. And the way it is achieved is, by actively *putting of the old and putting of the new* – replacing the one with the other.

Holiness is knowing how God wants us to live and pursuing it - it's not difficult to understand (you don't need a theology degree) because God's desire is for us to be holy - for us to know how He wants us to live, why shouldn't He make it clear, it's not like some puzzle a complicated riddle for us to work out!

And this process is perfectly summed up in the book of *Ephesians*, it's simple in instruction but not so simple to carry out, but simple in clarity what we have to do - and it is: Stop that and do this!

Excerpts from Ephesians 4:-

*"Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbour, (what could be clearer!)*

*"Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need". (no riddle here it's as clear as day)*

*"Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs" (no theology degree needed)*

*"Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you." (No need to crack the code on this one!)*

Paul was inspired enough to know we don't live in a vacuum, If you stop doing something you have to replace it with something else. God doesn't just ask us to stop sinning (the negative) but to replace it by living a holy life (the positive).

It is actively acting in the 'opposite spirit' as Edwin has so correctly discerned - if people 'curse you bless them' –'turn the other cheek' as we said on Monday night.

And think of this as a concluding thought: think of where we are going after this life? - Heaven that is, but it is essentially a holy place; its inhabitants are all holy; the things we do will be all holy. To be really happy in heaven, it is clear and plain that we must be trained and made ready for heaven while we are on earth – made holy, otherwise it will be like a square peg trying to live in a round hole we simply won't fit in there!

Finally, there is no easy path to holiness, to growing in the graces - the '*fruit of the spirit*', and I don't want to condemn anyone this morning, if you feel you haven't grown enough, I just want to encourage you to go on. To pursue holiness – to make every effort to be as like Jesus as you possibly can.

I will leave you with these words from JC Ryle (whose book holiness is probably the best on this subject I have read).

*"If you're not growing take the advice I give you. Resolve this very day that you will find out the reason of your stand still condition. Probe with a faithful and firm hand every corner of your soul. Search from one end of the camp to the other, till you find out the Achan who is weakening your hands.*

*Begin with an application (a request) to the Lord Jesus Christ, the great Physician of souls, and ask Him to heal the secret ailment within you, whatever it may be. Begin as if you had never applied to Him before, and ask for grace to cut off the right hand and pluck out the right eye. But never, never be content, if your soul does not grow. For your peace sake, for your usefulness sake, for the honour of your Maker's cause, resolve to find out the reason why."*

Let's strive for holiness for "without holiness we will not see the Lord"

Amen.

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