

Finding Our Identity in Jesus Series

Blessed with Holiness (Ephesians 1:4)

By
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These sermon study notes are designed to be a tool used after listening to the sermon. This resource is a guide to help deepen understanding regarding the Scriptures and ideas presented in the sermon. Those who use these study notes are encouraged to look up, read through, and think about Scripture references in this guide. There is more information in these notes than what is presented in the sermon. These study notes are designed to be used as an independent study tool to help the formation of Biblical convictions, character, and conduct.

Blessed with Holiness

I. Introduction

A. Illustration: Unknown Christmas Gift

1. When we were at my parents for Christmas, Mandi and I had the joy of watching our kids get excited opening presents. It's fun to watch their joy as they rip off the wrapping paper with excitement, impatiently waiting to discover what is inside.
2. Every now and then, the expression on their face changes drastically when they get a present open. Sometimes our kids don't know what it is they just received. This year, it happened to Caleb. He opened a present from my dad, looked at the present, and tried to figure out what the present was and what it was used for.
3. As Caleb turned the present over in his hands, examining it carefully, he finally asked the question, "What is it?" It was a credit card shaped multitool (a small set of tools that would fit in a wallet). My dad began explaining all the different tools on this small credit card-shaped piece of metal.

B. Once Caleb identified the purpose of his present, he understood how it worked and what to use it for. It was no longer an unknown mystery. If he didn't know how to use any of the tools, he could read the manual that came with it. The manual explains and demonstrates how to use each tool. The gift had to be properly identified, its purpose needed to be understood, and written instructions were provided to help him know how to use it.

C. All this is true with the spiritual gifts God gives to us in the Christian life, as well. If we don't understand what the purpose of the Christian life is, we will not know how to "use it" effectively—we won't understand how it is supposed to impact us. God's word is a written manual that helps us learn how to use the spiritual gifts given to us by God. In Ephesians 1:4, we learn the purpose behind why God saves us—why we are rescued from sin and forgiven. Many Christians misunderstand the purpose of why God works in their life. If you think God saved you to get you into heaven, you'd be wrong. That would be like saying the purpose of my job is to get the company shirt.

II. Blessed with Holiness

A. As a child of God, we've been given everything we need. Jesus provides access to every good benefit God the Father wants His people to have. We are provided all that is necessary for being transformed to be the person God is working in us to be. Children of God live in relational harmony with God that shapes their lifestyle in a way that moves us towards becoming the type of worshipper that pleases God. Now, we are going to start identifying and applying each of the spiritual benefits we receive from Jesus through the Holy Spirit.

B. Throughout the rest of this series, we are going to see that our identity as a child of God moves our lives in the direction of God. The spiritual benefits God provides, when properly understood and applied, will move us toward specific outcomes. Who we are impacts how we live. We are going to discover this central truth of Christianity: the purpose of God saving us is to empower us to live a holy life. God does not save us to get us into heaven; God saves us to change who we are and how we live.

C. There are two practical blessings given to us in the verse following the general statement about all the blessings:

⁴ just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love (Eph. 1:4)¹

D. The first practical blessing of God is holiness (“that we would be holy”, v. 4).² Holiness can have different meanings in the Bible. In general, holiness means to be set apart from the world to be dedicated to God, which entails moral purity.³ Holiness means we become people who are useful to God as we do the good work He has for us to do (Eph. 2:10, 2 Tim. 2:21). Anything that is holy belongs to God, and He decides how to use it for His purposes.

E. If any person thinks they are right with God and has received salvation, they will also, out of necessity, develop a God-honoring lifestyles as well. Salvation and sanctification are inseparable; God chooses His people for both. The ideal and goal of the Christian life is perfect holiness (Mt. 5:48).⁴ This is the purpose and goal of salvation—God saves people to shape them in specific ways as a person. God works in the lives of His children to form them into people who will worship Him the way He desires (Jn. 4:23).

F. An excellent description of the holiness of the children of God can be found in another writing by the same author:

¹¹ For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all people, ¹² instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously, and in a godly manner in the present age, ¹³ looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, ¹⁴ who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, eager for good deeds. ¹⁵ These things speak and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. No one is to disregard you. (Tit. 2:11-15)

G. Holiness is a moral lifestyle that is dedicated to living in a way that is pleasing to God. Through Bible instruction and the work of God in our lives, children of God are transformed from a life lived disconnected from God and focused on themselves to a life lived in connection with God that is focused on God. Instead of acting on thoughts and attitudes that are disrespectful to God, immoral, and exclusively focused on this world, these desires are rejected and resisted (“deny ungodliness and worldly desires”, v. 12).⁵ Holiness replaces this life orientation with one

¹ Matthew 25:34

² The first blessing mentioned is God choosing us to be a child of His (“just as He chose us in Him”, v. 4). This is called election by theologians. Due to the complexity of this blessing and the debate surrounding it, I have chosen to skip this blessing to be dealt with in the next message. I didn’t want this practical message to turn into a doctrinal explanation/debate over how to understand how election works. Due to the various positions within the church, the topic of election needs to be handled carefully due to the common disagreement that exists in the church.

³ William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 10–11.

⁴ Francis Foulkes, *Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 10, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 55–56. S. M. Baugh, *Ephesians*, Evangelical Exegetical Commentary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015), 80.

⁵ Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on Titus 2:12 “ungodliness” and “worldly desires”

that is moral, wise, self-controlled, and showing proper respect to God.⁶ Holiness is a God-focused moral lifestyle empowered by God.

- H. As children of God, we are commanded to be holy. Holiness isn't an option that we can choose to neglect or freely dismiss. It is an intentional focus and pursuit of our life that flows from the new nature God has given to us as a child of His. Focusing on and intentionally striving for holiness is an essential characteristic of a healthy Christian life. Those who refuse to accept the fact that a God-oriented moral lifestyle is a necessary indicator of being a child of God has rejected God (1 Thess. 4:7-8). All genuine children of God will take their personal growth in holiness seriously as a permanent and continual life goal.
- I. Here is a command from God to the children of God regarding holiness,
¹⁴ As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts *which were yours* in your ignorance,¹⁵ but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all *your* behavior;¹⁶ because it is written: "You shall be holy, for I am holy."
(1 Pet. 1:14-16)
- J. There are two moral commands related to holiness. The first is to no longer live and act as people who don't know God ("do not be comforted to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance", v. 14). Children of God can't continue living the way they did before they were connected to Jesus. The second is to be transformed to be like God ("be holy yourselves also in all your behavior", v. 15).⁷ Children of God act the way Jesus acted. As we submissively conform our entire selves to the standards of God found in His word, we become holy both in negative ways—ceasing doing wrong—and in positive ways—starting to do good.
- K. What desires do you know are inside you that you need to reject and resist because they are part of the life you lived prior to your commitment to Jesus? Do you still allow old patterns and tendencies to continue to influence how you act? Are there any regular behaviors that you know are wrong that you currently keep doing?
- L. Are there any good actions you know God wants you to perform that you are currently refusing to act on? What is your process of continuing to learn about the good actions God desires and requires? Do you regularly keep your eyes open for actions you can perform to benefit others and glorify God?

III. Blessed with Blamelessness

- A. An element of holiness is mentioned as the second practical blessing provided by God the Father, through Jesus, developed in us by the Holy Spirit:⁸
and blameless before Him. In love (Eph. 1:4)
- B. Blamelessness refers to the specific aspect of holiness involved with getting rid of our spiritual problem areas ("and blameless", v. 4). To be blameless is to be without blemish or fault—having no defects (2 Cor. 7:1).⁹ Children of God learn and grow to live a type of lifestyle in which they are not easily blamed of wrongdoing. This is why being above reproach is mentioned

⁶ Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on Titus 2:12 "sensibly", "righteously", and "in a godly manner"

⁷ 1 Corinthians 10:31

⁸ 1 Thessalonians 3:13 describes blamelessness as an element or subcategory of holiness.

⁹ Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on Ephesians 1:4 "blameless"

alongside being blameless (Phil. 2:15). As children of God, the Spirit works in us so that we clear up, overcome, and remove spiritual faults and moral wrongdoings from our lives. While this process is progressive in nature in this life, it will be successfully completed as the power of God transforms the children of God.

- C. The successful completion of this lifestyle project is affirmed later in this letter:

²⁷ 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. (Eph. 5:27)
- D. Blamelessness is described as without any spiritual blemish (“having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing, v. 27). The imagery of a physical defect is frequently used to describe blamelessness. However, our blamelessness as children of God primarily refers to our soul and morality rather than our physical body.
- E. Moral freedom that leads to a lack of guilt and shame is a tremendous blessing given to us by God so that we no longer live a life of self-condemnation. Being weighed down by a guilty conscience does not have to be the norm for the child of God. We can grow to live confidently in the presence of God through our ever-expanding obedience to His word. We can move beyond the self-loathing that comes with constantly living in guilt and shame.
- F. We get more information about what it means to be blameless in another text where we see Paul combining holiness and blamelessness,

²¹ And although you were previously alienated and hostile in attitude, *engaged* in evil deeds, ²² yet He has now reconciled you in His body of flesh through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach—²³ if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister. (Col. 1:21-23)
- G. To be blameless is to move away from morally unacceptable attitudes and actions (“attitude, engaged in evil deeds”, v. 21). The heart, attitudes, and dispositions we are to develop as a child of God includes being compassionate, kind, humble, gentle, patient, putting up with the faults and weaknesses of others, forgiving, and loving (Col. 3:12-14). Any attitudes and actions contrary to these holy attitudes and actions are faults that we become freed from so that we can be blameless.
- H. As children of God, we are to strive to become a person who is blameless—without spiritual and moral faults,

¹⁴ Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found spotless and blameless by Him, at peace, (2 Pet. 3:14)
- I. Are you aware of your spiritual and moral faults? How sensitive are you in paying attention to the blemishes and problems occurring in your soul? If you are aware of problematic attitudes and actions, what are you doing to overcome and correct them? Do you have a plan aligned with the resources and word of God to move you toward victory? Some defects of the soul are obvious such as lust or anger.¹⁰ Other defects of the soul are not so obvious like pride or fear.

¹⁰ 1 Peter 2:11

By using a knowledge of the word of God with the conviction of the Spirit, as children of God, we can become familiar with the moral shortcomings of our soul, and we can begin correcting them with the help of God.

- J. The way we partner with the Holy Spirit to become blameless is to be interested in and desire holiness (“be diligent”, v. 14). The more spiritually mature we become the more passionate we will be about growing in holiness including the removal of our spiritual faults. We consistently work hard at becoming holy and blameless by devoting time, effort, and attention to the growth of our soul knowing one of the wonderful benefits of doing so is an increasing sense of peace (“at peace”, v. 14). We can experience a significant amount of peace, internally, in our relationship with God, and in our relationships with other people when we are holy. If you want peace in your life, pursue personal holiness.

IV. How to Become Holy

- A. The next natural question becomes, how do we become holy practically? Even if I identify my spiritual faults through the guilt I feel that realization doesn’t help me do the right action in the future. Through the example of Jesus’ ministry for the church, Paul instructs us how to become holy and blameless. The means by which children of God take hold of and grow in the blessings of God is described,

²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, ²⁶ so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, (Eph. 5:25-26)

- B. Jesus, who will present the church to the Father holy and blameless, and His ministry methods are explained in their most basic form. There are two key components involved in the process of growing in holiness and blamelessness: 1) spiritual growth moving toward maturity and 2) contact with and a positive response to God’s word. Growing in the process of being transformed to be like Jesus is how we become holy and blameless (“so that He might sanctify her”, v. 26). Sanctification is the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in our soul to change us to be like Jesus (Eph. 3:16-19, 4:13). God’s power strengthens His children internally so that Jesus will dwell in our hearts. I cannot recommend more highly the book *An Infinite Journey: Growing toward Christlikeness* by Andrew Davis to help you understand what sanctification is and how it works. In this book, sanctification is the internal journey of growth into Christlikeness in all areas of life.¹¹
- C. Putting time, effort, and thoughtfulness into our personal spiritual growth is the means by which we experience more observable results regarding the blessings of God. The closer we walk with God and the longer we walk with God the more He will pour His life into us and build within us godly character traits. Being passive in the Christian life will not produce significant degrees of fruitfulness. Children of God work hard using the resources of God in partnership with the Spirit to grow into the person God is creating us to be,

¹ Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let’s cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. (2 Cor. 7:1)

¹¹ Andrew M. Davis, *An Infinite Journey: Growing toward Christlikeness* (Greenville, SC: Ambassador International, 2013).

- D. Intentional focus and effort directed toward partnering with God and the work He is doing in us produces the outcomes of holiness and blamelessness (Phil. 2:12-13). Let's return to our main text that describes how to grow in holiness in Ephesians 5. In addition to general spiritual growth, growing in a knowledge of and a positive response to the word of God develops holiness ("having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word", Eph. 5:26). The word of God works in the children of God to spiritually clean them. The Bible is essential to the Spirit's work in us. Jesus made the same point with His own disciples (Jn. 15:16, 19, 8:31-32). Having an ongoing connection with the word of God and responding appropriately to it produces what God intends to produce in our lives.
- E. As we are working in harmony with the Spirit to be holy, we also continue in the word of God to grow spiritually,

¹ Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, ² and like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, (1 Pet. 2:1-2)

- F. As we work diligently to become the person God is working in us to be and we stay connected to the word of God in a healthy way, God will grow holiness and blamelessness in our lives ("long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow", v. 2).¹² We will see progress. God has planned and called us into holiness and blamelessness; He also produces it in us when we are faithful and obedient. Deepening holiness is a byproduct of growing in spiritual maturity.

V. Conclusion

- A. As children of God, we are set apart for God's purposes and are empowered to live a life of eternal significance. We are saved so that we can be empowered to become the person God creates us to be. As a benefit of becoming who God wants us to be, He grants us access to Himself and heaven.
- B. As children of God, we can be encouraged and feel safe and secure by continuing to trust the work Jesus is doing in us,

²⁴ Now to Him who is able to protect you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory, blameless with great joy, ²⁵ to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority before all time and now and forever. Amen. (Jude 24-25)

¹² Psalm 37:3-6