



TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Sermon Notes

Holiness: Three Things We Must Remember (2)

Ephesians 4:1-5:20

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What To Say to a World Like Ours?

- Holiness is among the biggest of ideas for it is the essence of who *God* is. And he calls *us* to be holy as he is (see 1 Pet. 1:15-16). To say that is daunting understates it. Yet, some seem to treat the call as a ho-hum, casual thing.
- I wonder if it will help our practice of holy living to remind ourselves of what our world is like and just how *separate* (the basic meaning of holiness) we are to be.
- Consider some specifics:
 - A thriving economy where many do well and make possible the impressive, expensive buildings that attract tourists from around the world, house entertainment venues, and build and expand massive stadiums. Yet, not far away are those living in poverty.
 - Many of the religious are among the wealthy and build their own impressive buildings.
 - The religious culture is diverse, with a variety of houses of worship and beliefs; some are thoughtful, others make bold use of what appeals to the senses.
 - Some worldviews have little if any connection with religion; some more actively cater to the culture's love of the sensual.
 - A mark of prestige and importance is being a center of institutions associated with government power.
 - There are multiple ethnic groups; the culture is a melting pot, but at times a place where relationships between different races are bitter and acrimonious.
- What counsel is best for the church in such a world? Well, when Paul faced ancient Ephesus — the world I just described¹ — he said:
 - They had been chosen to “be *holy* and blameless before [God]” (Eph. 1:4; 5:26-27).
 - That Jews and Gentiles with their bitter, hateful history, were to be “fellow citizens” who, “being joined together, grow into a *holy* temple in the Lord” (2:19, 21).
 - They were to avoid such things as “sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness” because such things were improper for holy people (5:3).
 - Throughout the letter he called them “saints,” that is, “the ones being holy” (τοῖς ἁγίοις τοῖς οὖσιν, *tois hagiois tois ousin*) (1:1; see 1:15, 18; 2:19; 3:8, 18; 4:12; 5:3; 6:18).

¹ See the introductory notes to Ephesians by S. M. Baugh in the *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 2258-2259.

- Ephesians shows that at the core of Paul's appeal to holiness are the same principles we saw in Deuteronomy 10-11, in part 1. We also see how they are deepened in Christ's covenant.

The Great Principles in Christ's Way

- *First, it's grace.* God's call for his people to be holy is first, foremost, and always by *GRACE*.
 - Perhaps the most famous text is 2:8-9, the pivot passage for the letter's doctrinal half.
 - He also uses "grace" in 1:6, 7; 2:5; 3:2, 7-8.
 - He speaks of God's "gifts" or act of giving in 1:17, 22; 2:8; 3:2, 7-8, 16.
 - He continues the theme when he moves to the practical half of the letter.
 - He speaks of our "calling" (4:1, 3).
 - "... *grace* was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ's *gift*" (4:7).
 - "'When he ascended on high . . . he *gave gifts* to men'" (4:8; citing Psa. 68:18).
 - He "gave" the church her leaders (4:11-12).
 - All of this was part of the process whereby he enabled each of us to "put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness" (4:24).
 - This is all emphasized in light of the appeal to "walk in a manner worthy of the calling" (4:1); it continues as he turns to the specific behaviors of that call.
 - 4:29 - we learn to speak so we can build up and "give grace to those who hear."
 - 4:32 - we practice kindness and tenderheartedness, "*forgiving* one another, as God in Christ *forgave* [us]." Both uses of "forgive" translate *χαρίζομαι* (*charizomai*), the primary meaning of which is "give or grant freely as a favor"² ("grace" is *χάρις*, *charis*).
- *Second, God means what he says.* God does give rules, and means what he says; but he does so with the knowledge of consequences and in the interest of our good.
 - Ephesians is noted for the equal division of its parts: doctrinal (1-3), practical (4-6).
 - 4:1 declares the practical theme, which can be summarized: "Christ's people are renewed to new lives of holiness in thought, word, and deed, and must reject their old, sinful lifestyle" (Baugh, 2260). (4:1-3, 17-32; 5:1-20)
 - Closer examination reveals that the behavior Paul specifies is not just a suggestion: There are 40 imperative verbs in Ephesians; 39 are between 4:25 and 6:18, and 34 are between 4:25 and 6:9. 26 are between 4:25 and 5:20.³
 - There are commands (rules) concerning honesty (4:25), anger (4:26, 31), stealing (4:28), speech (4:29), forgiveness (4:32), sexual sins and covetousness (idolatry) (5:2-3), partnering with worldliness (5:7-8, 11), and drunkenness and related sins (5:18).
 - But, the commands are consistently about what is best for us; see e.g., 4:25, 28, 29.
- *Third, it's always personal.* Holiness expectations are from a person and for people.
 - That the commands are given for personal well-being or for the well-being of the community is evident from the examples given above.

² F. Wilbur Gingrich, *Shorter Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, ed. Frederick W. Danker, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), BibleWorks. v.10. The second meaning listed is, "remit, forgive, pardon."

³ This does not include participles which take on the force of the imperatives that govern them. See for example 5:15-16 where the participle, "making the best use of the time" (16) has the force of a command because of the imperative, "Look carefully" (15).

- But also notice how much attention Paul gives to the divine nature and to the fact that the commands are to be observed in the context of a relationship with or imitation of God.
 - Our walk is to be worthy of our calling from God (4:1).
 - The unity we are commanded to maintain is to match the essential unity of the one Spirit, one Lord, and one God and Father of all (4:3-6).
 - The expectation of growth is to attain “to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God” (4:13), to “grow up . . . into Christ” (4:15).
 - The difference between the futile way of darkness and the new self “created after *the likeness of God*” (4:24) is in “learn[ing] Christ” (4:20).
 - Kindness, tenderheartedness and forgiveness follow the example of “God in Christ” (4:32) as “imitators of God” who “walk in love, as Christ loved” (5:1-2).
 - We are to “try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord” (5:10).
 - We are to “understand what the will of the Lord is” (5:17).
 - We “submit to one another out of reverence for Christ” (5:21).

A Deeper, Bigger Holiness

- It is important that we see the consistency of our three big principles in both covenants.
- It is also important to see their more intense quality in Christ’s covenant.
 - At an earlier stage in the revelation process (e.g., Deut. 10-11), the external behaviors received more emphasis; it’s the same principle we use when teaching children.
 - But, as we grow into maturity, we should come to see ethical holiness differently.
- So, notice Paul’s emphasis on *character*, not what we do, but who we are (becoming).
 - 4:2 - humility, gentleness, patience, bearing with one another, love.
 - 4:14 - stop being and acting like children; grow up.
 - 4:20-24 - learn Christ and put on a new character.
 - 4:32 - kind, tenderhearted, grace-giving.
 - 5:1-2 - imitate God and love as Christ loved.
 - Could it be that we sometimes struggle with ethical holiness because we’re still approaching it as mainly about what we do instead of letting God change who we are? As we *are* a certain way, we will *do* certain things.
- How do we *become* holy? *Learn* Christ (4:20). Not just what he did. Who was he? What was his character? What would he do in our shoes? Immerse ourselves into his will in order to learn his nature, will, and character, and we will become more holy, just as he is holy.

December 14, 2014
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