

How to be Holy

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 07 February 2021

Preacher: Ian Naismith

[0 : 00] Well, good morning everyone. It's really good to have you with us at our morning service on what is in many ways a sad day for the church, although we do rejoice that for Robert it is now so much better.

Great also to see the new life that we have in our church in recent months. Holy Moses, Holy Elijah, Holy Daniel, Holy Paul, Holy you, Holy me.

What is it that links these great Bible characters and us as we would seek to be holy? Well, I would suggest it is that they stood out as being different in their generation and when other people were rejecting God, they remained faithful to him.

To be holy is to be different from the world round about us. Last week, you may remember, Graham talked about us being question marks that people can look at and can recognise that there's something different about us.

To be holy is to be devoted to God and to live for him and to seek to serve him, whatever the circumstances round about us. And holiness is one of the great themes of Paul's letter to the Ephesians.

[1 : 26] Eleven times in Ephesians, Paul talks about the fact that as Christians, as a church, as God's family, we are holy. It's not directly in this passage, but it certainly is behind everything that Paul is writing about here.

This is about how we are to be holy. But before we dig into the passage, let's just orientate ourselves a bit in Ephesians.

It's good just occasionally to remind ourselves of the big themes of the book. So we have in Ephesians, God's purpose and God's people.

God's purpose and God's people. In chapters 1 to 3, Paul writes particularly about what God's purpose is. And God's great purpose is, chapter 1 in verse 10, is to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.

And we are part of that. As God brings everything together under Christ. As we have come to know him as by God's grace and through faith, we have been saved from our sin.

[2 : 43] So we are the people of God and we are part of God's purpose in bringing everything together. Then chapters 4 to 6, Paul talks about how we should live as God's people.

And we broadly divide that into four sections. There's how we should live in the church. We thought about that in chapter 4, about our unity and about the gifts we use to build one another up.

There's how we should live in the world. Last couple of weeks we were thinking about that. How we should be different. How the things that are very common in our society are not things which are appropriate for Christians.

For the next couple of weeks we're going to be thinking about how we should live in the home. That will become particularly evident next week as we think about the Christian household. Which in Paul's day would largely have consisted of a husband and wife and children and slaves.

Not so evident in the passage today but that is the background to it. It's the Christian in the home. And then finally we have the Christian in the spiritual realms with principalities and powers against us.

[3 : 53] And putting on the armour of God. So today we're starting the section which is principally about the Christian in the home. And I think there's a bit of a change of tone in this section.

What we've been looking at over the last couple of weeks is what we shouldn't do as Christians. Things that we should avoid. Over the next couple of weeks we're going to be looking much more at what we should do.

What are the positive things as believers in the Lord Jesus that should characterise our lives. So for example last week at the start of chapter 5 we were thinking of Paul's command that we should avoid sexual immorality.

At the end of chapter 5 Paul talks about the love of a husband and a wife. For the last couple of weeks Paul has talked a lot about how we speak, what we say.

About the dangers of loose talk. Towards the end of chapter 5 we're looking at it today. He talks about speaking to each other in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs.

[5 : 02] Early in chapter 5 Paul urges us to avoid pride. And at the end of chapter 5 he tells us that we should submit to one another.

So it is presenting the positive way that we should live as Christians. That we should be holy. So let's think about how this passage divides up.

I've used two good Scots words to help us understand. It's a good day to day to be Scottish I think after what happened at Twickenham yesterday. So I'm suggesting that verses 15 to 17 at the start of the passage can be summarized as use your holy gumption.

And then verses 18 to 21, I've stolen the verse from Graham next week but I'll give it back later.

Verse 18 to 21 I'm suggesting we could say is be full of the Holy Spirit.

Let you judge as we go along whether these are good descriptions highlighting the passages. So first of all we need to use our holy gumption.

[6 : 07] Gumption is a great word. It was originally a Scottish word and it just meant wise.

Gumption is wisdom. But as it's spread out to the rest of the UK and indeed overseas particularly to the United States, it's taken on a broader meaning.

And it's not just about being wise in some kind of theoretical sense. It's about knowing what you should do and doing it.

So the Chambers Dixstree definition says that gumption is the ability to decide what is the best thing to do in a particular situation and to do it with energy and determination.

To do it with energy and determination. And I think that's quite a good summary of what Paul is saying in these three verses.

He says that we should live, literally means we should walk, but we should live carefully and make sure we're not unwise but we're wise.

[7 : 10] And two particular things he says we should pay attention to. We should be redeeming the time, verse 16, and we should be understanding the Lord's will, verse 17.

How we use our time is really, really important. All of us have 24 hours in every day. We don't all use them as well as each other.

And it's very easy to waste time. I can, if I get in the mood, spend hours on an app, perhaps an app or a puzzle or something on my phone, because I spend far too long on it when I could be doing better things.

Maybe for you it's video games or daytime television or box sets or even just sleeping. Things which are not bad in themselves and can be helpful in helping us to relax and be refreshed.

But if we spend too long on them, then they're taking away from time that we could be using more profitably. And so Paul says in the NIV, making the most of every opportunity.

[8 : 24] There were some people in lockdown, time has hung pretty heavy on them. All days have been more or less the same, and they found it difficult to find productive things to do.

I'm thankful that's not my experience, but I know it is for many. And it is difficult. And yet there are always things we can do that will be profitable, that will help us to redeem the time.

Whether it is in current circumstances, giving someone a phone call, writing an email or a letter, or to the extent we're allowed, helping them practically. But it's also using the time that perhaps we've been given, time we maybe don't normally have, to deepen our relationship with the Lord Jesus, to spend time thinking and meditating on our Bible, perhaps reading some good Christian books, and making sure this time that is very different from what we normally have, that it isn't wasted.

God wants us to use every opportunity to further our holiness and our devotion to him, and to help others, whether it's helping them practically, or perhaps helping them spiritually.

A word we can say about the Lord Jesus, or something like that. We need to redeem the time. And then secondly, in verse 17, Paul says we need to understand the Lord's will.

[9 : 55] He says, do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. Now the question of guidance, and how we know the right things to do in life, it is often very difficult.

What are the right things for my career, my family, my Christian service, and so on? It's good that we ask these questions, and that we think carefully about them.

I'm not sure that's what Paul is thinking about here, though. I think that Paul is talking about God's will, as it has been revealed in Scripture, and as it applies to all of us.

So it is the things that we learn in the Bible that God says, this is how I want you to be. So I am to be holy, because God is holy.

I'm to love the Lord my God with all my heart, with all my soul, with all my mind, and with all my strength. And I'm to love my neighbor as myself.

[11:00] And to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the only one who can bring me salvation. We need to understand these things, which are not difficult to understand in a sense, but can be difficult to put into practice.

And they're things which the world around us just doesn't understand. The importance of our relationship with God as the basis for our relationships with our neighbors.

Biblical wisdom is always practical. We need to use our holy gumption. God doesn't want us to be spending all our time finding obscure verses in the Bible and looking for hidden meanings in them. Rather, he wants us to take what he has revealed to us and to put it into practice and to live holy lives for him. We have to use our holy gumption.

Then verses 18 to 21, I've headed, Be foo of the Holy Spirit. Now the Scottish word foo at one level just means fool, as it sounds.

[12:16] But actually in practice, normally when it's used, it means drunk, inebriated, under the influence of alcohol. And so Paul is saying in verse 18, Don't get drunk on wine or beer or whiskey or whatever, but be filled with the Spirit.

So there's a comparison here. On the one hand, we might choose to get drunk to go out and to have a good time and to drink lots of pints and feel that that is liberating us and we can be really happy.

And Paul says that's foolishness. That just leads to debauchery. It leads to losing our self-control. It is not a way for the Christian to live.

On the other hand, we can seek to be full of the Holy Spirit, to let the Spirit work in our lives and lead us in God's way.

Both of them we could describe as being under the influence. But when we're under the influence of alcohol, what happens is we lose control of ourselves.

[13:29] When we're under the influence of the Spirit, Paul reminds us in Galatians that one of the fruit of the Spirit is self-control. One of the great, perhaps the greatest British preacher of the 20th century was Martin Lloyd-Jones.

His books on Ephesians particularly are probably definitive. Martin Lloyd-Jones was also a doctor. So when he wrote on this verse, he wrote with some authority.

And here's part of what he said. He says, alcohol is a depressant. Depressing everything that gives us self-control, wisdom, understanding, discrimination, judgment, balance, the power to assess everything.

We may feel stimulated by alcohol. In fact, it is depressing the higher parts of our brains. On the other hand, says Dr Lloyd-Jones, the Spirit is a stimulant, stimulating our mind and intellect, our heart, our will.

I'm not saying never have a drink. That is not what I'm saying this morning. But Christians should avoid getting drunk to the point where they lose control. And our priority must be to have the control of the Spirit in our lives, to be under the influence of the Holy Spirit, let him fill us, and to live lives that are holy and pleasing to God.

[14:58] And Paul then brings us four things that are reflective of those who are full of the Holy Spirit. As I say, I'm taking verse 21 because that is part of the same sentence in the Greek, but Graham will talk about it in more detail next week.

But the first thing we have to do, says Paul, is singing to one another. Actually, he doesn't say that. He says we should speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.

What does he mean by that? Well, sometimes it is good to speak the words of hymns. If you listen to Graham Shank's preaching, very often he will take an old hymn and he will use the words of that to illustrate a point and to drive it home.

And he's in good company with that. Paul did it frequently. Probably verse 14 of this chapter, just before where we are today, is taken from an old hymn. Wake up, O sleeper, arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.

So speaking the words of hymns can be helpful. But I don't think Paul is just restricting me to that. I think he's thinking about singing as well. I don't think either that the difference, if any, between psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs is that important in this verse.

[16:11] We could perhaps say psalms are the words of scripture, hymns are what has been written by others in song, and spiritual songs might be those that come spontaneously to us.

But I'm not sure if that's right, and I don't think it's important. What is important in this part of the verse is that we are speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.

Most hymns, and I think particularly most modern Christian songs, are about me and God, about my relationship to the Lord Jesus. There's nothing wrong with that.

It's great to reflect on God's goodness to me as an individual. But it's good also to remember that Christian hymns and songs are designed to be sung together.

Really sad that we can't do it together at the moment. Hopefully it won't be too long before we can. And as we sing together, as we join together in praising God, then we are encouraging one another, we are building one another up in our faith.

[17:18] Hymns and songs are great for reinforcing Bible truths in a way that is memorable and in a way that draws us to God.

They're not a substitute for the Bible, and we need to be careful that the words of the hymns and songs we sing really are scriptural. But they're a great way for us as a church, as a group of God's people, to encourage and exhort one another as we seek to serve the Lord Jesus.

And I do particularly like hymns and songs where we come together to God as a group, and it's about us and not just about me. Although, as I say, the hymns that are about me and God can be a really good testimony to others.

But we are to use the words of hymns and songs to encourage and build one another up. But of course, when we sing, we're not primarily singing for one another.

We are primarily bringing praise in our heart to God. And that's the second half of verse 19. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord.

[18:25] I particularly like the way that J.B. Phyllis put it in his paraphrase. Make music in your hearts for the ears of the Lord. Some of us, when we make music, or when we try to make music, it can be quite offensive to other people's ears because we're not musical.

And yet, all of us can make music in our heart to the Lord. It's not what comes out of our mouth or how it comes out that's really important. It's what's in our heart and how we feel as we come to God and bring him sincerely, our praise, our thanksgiving, perhaps also our confession and our requests in song.

We sing to the Lord. We sing for his glory and to help us to draw closer to him and to show him how much we love and appreciate him.

And that brings us on to the third thing that Paul talks about here. Because he says we should be thankful, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, Graham talked about thankfulness last week, so I'm not going to spend a lot of time on it. But let me just reflect on this. That very often, it's the people who go through the most difficult, trying times in their lives who come across as the most thankful.

[19:50] And these are people who are then truly holy. They are suffering from illness or from tragedy in their lives. And yet they're thankful to the Lord for everything he's done for them and for his daily mercies.

And you often find on the other side that those of us who haven't really suffered that much, whose lives have been in relative terms quite easy, are often the quickest to grumble when minor things go wrong.

That is not how it should be. All of us should be thankful to God for his goodness in our lives. Now, I know it says thank God for everything.

I don't think that is to be taken too literally. We're not to thank God for evil in our world. We're not to thank God that COVID has been such a disaster around the world. But rather, we can thank God in these circumstances for the good that he does and the blessings that he gives to us.

Because we do it in the name of the Lord Jesus. And everything we have, everything we are, is in the name of Jesus and because of him.

[21 : 01] And then finally, and I'm not going to speak on this much, but just at the end, verse 21, Paul talks about submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

And that is part of the same sentence where he talks about singing and giving thanks. It's not all about what we might call the softer things, the things that are to do with our thoughts and our emotions, rather it is to do with our actions as well.

And we are to submit to one another. And particularly in this context, it is about submitting in the home, in the place where people know us better than they do anywhere else in our world.

We are called to live for God and to submit appropriately to others. We are to be full of the Holy Spirit. When we have the Holy Spirit, with us, these are the kind of things that will happen.

People sing when they get drunk. How much better it is to sing God's praises to one another and to God, to be thankful in our lives and to have relationships with one another which are respectful, loving, which show the character of the Lord Jesus.

[22 : 21] If we want to be holy, we have to use our holy gumption. And we have to be full of the Holy Spirit. And I started by listing a number of people who I described as holy or potentially holy in our case.

I didn't mention someone called Holy Willie. You may have come across Holy Willie. Holy Willie's prayer is a poem written by Robert Burns.

And Holy Willie was a pillar of the Kirk. He was one of these people who was very respectable who felt that others should be looking up to him.

And to start with, Holy Willie's prayer is very good. He recognises God's greatness and God's sovereignty and his own unworthiness. But as you go on, you begin to see that there's a certain smugness about Holy Willie.

Let me just read one verse from this poem. I don't think it would be too difficult to understand. O Lord, thou kens what seal I bear When drinkers drink and swearers swear And singing here and dancing there we great and small For I am keep it by thy fear Free from them all So Holy Willie's thinking, yes, I'm a good man It's a bit like the Pharisee that went into the temple the Lord talked about I'm a good person, I'm better than others But then as the poem goes on It emerges that Holy Willie isn't a doubter He's got full with wine and committed debauchery He's spiteful, he's vengeful, he's very nasty Actually, he's not holy at all All the holiness that Holy Willie has Is just for show It's just a public appearance And we need to be very careful about that too in our lives

[24 : 19] If we seek to be holy and to live for the Lord Jesus Is that something that's real and evidence and that people can see?

Or is it something that we only put on as a veneer for a Sunday Or in certain circumstances And doesn't really reflect what our lives are like?

So how can we be holy? Well, the start of it all is in accepting our unholiness before God Accepting our sin and our failure And recognising it only by trusting in Jesus And the fact that he died for us on the cross Can we truly become holy?

We need to put our trust in Jesus And then we receive the Holy Spirit And we're able to go on and live holy lives And then secondly, we do need to allow the Spirit to work in us To let the Spirit change our lives So we reflect more the character of the Lord Jesus To be full of the Spirit And that will evidence itself in all aspects of our lives As we seek his guidance and his leading As we respond to his prompts when we go wrong As we use his help to find the right way to live So we need to have the Holy Spirit And be filled with the Spirit And allow him to change our lives To become more like Jesus And then with the wisdom that the Spirit gives us We need to be willing to do the right thing

Whatever the circumstances To pursue godliness and holiness In a society which Paul describes as evil And is no different now from what it was then We need to use our holy gumption To do what is right To live for the Lord Jesus And to be holy as our God is holy My prayer this morning is that all of us That we may know the Lord Jesus as Saviour That we may experience the power and the leading of his Spirit In our lives And that we may be wise in the way that we live And follow our Saviour Let's pray together Our Father we thank you for your word We thank you for the way in which Paul describes How as Christians we can be holy How we need to be full of the Spirit

[27 : 08] Filled with the Holy Spirit And responding to him And how we need to act wisely In a foolish generation We pray that all of us may have our trust In the Lord Jesus And may live lives

that are pleasing to you And to him We want to pray again particularly for Dorothy Layton And we pray for your comfort And your strength for her We thank you for the memories that many of us have Of Robert and the fellowship we've enjoyed with him For many years And we pray for your blessing on Dorothy And other family members in the coming days We thank you for this time we've had together And we pray for your blessing on us now And that you'll be with us in the week to come We ask in the name of the Lord Jesus Amen