

## Ephesians 1:4-6

Paul told the Christians in Ephesus, and by extension us, that they had been adopted into God's family. As His children we are free to call Him our heavenly Father and to come into His presence at any time to praise Him, to tell Him we love Him and to share anything that is on our minds. Read Romans 8:16-17.

Being adopted by God gives us incredible privileges and blessings but also brings significant responsibility. Paul wrote that we have been adopted so we might be “**holy and blameless.**”

In the Bible, the words “**holy and blameless**” are used to describe what a Christian is both “*positionally*” and “*progressively*”. By virtue of our faith in Jesus we are positionally both holy and blameless while in our humanity we are to grow so we become more holy and more blameless in practice.

The word “**holy**” is another translation for “*saint*” which Paul used to describe the Ephesians in verse 1. It carried the idea of being different or set apart and here it carries the idea of being set apart unto God. Christians are *positionally* different because they have been adopted into the family of God. When God looks upon us, He sees not our sinfulness but the holiness of Jesus. We are literally robed in Jesus' holiness so in that sense we are already holy.

The other aspect of holiness is the *progressive* nature of it. Read Leviticus 19:2.

Note in that verse that God called Himself holy. There are many aspects of His holiness. Hosea 11:9 declares that God is utterly unlike any other. Psalm 40:5 declares that no one can compare to Him. When we think of holiness, we think of sinlessness and God is certainly sinless, but His holiness goes far beyond that. His love is a holy love because there is no other love like it. His mercy is a holy mercy because it is totally different from any other mercy. His grace is a holy grace because no other grace can compare to it, etc.

In Leviticus God was speaking to the nation of Israel and reminding them that just as He is different from all the other so-called gods, as His people they were to be different from the people around them. There were as many ways in which they were to be different as God is different. They were to be different in their desire to avoid sin and live by the standards God set for them. They were to be different in the way they loved their families and the way they treated their neighbors. They were to be different in that only Israel of all the nations around them kept the sabbath and a time of rest and worship. The way they worshipped was unique etc. Israel was challenged to be different because their God was different.

The New Testament declares that the new family of God, the church, is to be holy in the same way. Read I Peter 1:13-16.

Peter called upon Christians to be holy, to be different from the way the world lives. When Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus, he said that while the Christians there were holy by virtue of *position*, that did not automatically translate into how they lived daily. Paul challenged them to *progressively* develop holiness in their daily living.

Without a doubt one of the major failures of the church in America is that Christians are so much like the world that they do not stand out in any way as holy or different. Check out any statistics on lifestyles and Christians are the same as the world. Christians are divorcing at the same rate as society in general. Christians are having abortions at the same rate as society. Christians are becoming addicted to drugs, alcohol and pornography at the same rate as the rest of society. If you follow the average Christian around for a week and are not told he is a Christian the only hint you may get of his faith is his attendance on Sunday morning in church. The rest of the week is the same as everyone and being like the world is not being set apart, being different or holy. Paul spelled out some of the uniqueness that should characterize Christians or identify them as holy when he wrote in Romans 12:1-2. Read those verses.

Paul was not suggesting to the Christians in Ephesus that they be different by simply being weird. Some individuals who called themselves Christians stand out from the rest of the world by being obnoxious or strange. That was not what Paul was suggesting but rather that as Christians they cultivate those characteristics that clearly identify them as being like God. Read Galatians 5:13-16. Paul wrote that those are the characteristics God wants to instill in us because they are His holy characteristics. If those characteristics are evident in our lives, we will indeed be different from the world.

Paul's second challenge is to live as those who are without blemish. One can see this as just a repeat of being holy in that without blemish is to be without fault, but there is another possible dimension to Paul's challenge. The concept of being without blemish comes from the Old Testament sacrificial system. God told the Israelites the animals they offered as sacrifices were to be "without defect." Read Leviticus 1:3. Malachi wrote that offering a blemished sacrifice to God was a brazen sign of disrespect (Malachi 1:6-14).

The idea behind this was very simply that God deserves the best. He is perfect and if we are going to present an offering to Him it should be perfect. In that sense the challenge of Romans 12:1-2 that if we are an offering to God as we looked at a moment ago, we should seek to be holy or without blemish. But Paul may have had in mind another dimension to being holy when he added "**without blemish.**"

When a man selected an animal for sacrifice, he was first to examine it himself to be sure there was no defect in it and then he was to present it to the priest for their examination. Two concepts are present here, the first being self-examination. Read II Corinthians 13:5. Jesus made an interesting observation on the importance of self examination when He spoke, according to Matthew 7:3-5, on the necessity of self-examination before we judge others. Read those verses.

II Corinthians 13:5 begins in the Greek with “**yourselves**” which in Greek is a way of emphasis. The tense of the verb is such that it implies we should continually be examining ourselves. Put it together and we get the truth that individually we should be constantly examining ourselves to be sure we are living by God’s standard and not by the world’s standard. We should constantly be on guard lest we, as Paul noted, are squeezed into the mold of the world. When a lamb was selected for sacrifice at the Passover celebration the family was to carefully examine it for the 5 days before it was offered. That certainly speaks of a thorough and sustained self-examination. One of the things a Christians should continually do is evaluate this life by the standards of God’s Word. Am I avoiding the things God says I should have no part of and am I doing those things God says should characterize the life of a true Christian? Most genuine Christians can pass that test on the big items of our faith but where we tend to slip is on the smaller issues of conduct, the little attitudes and actions that we should be conscious of.

The second aspect of being seen as without blemish is an extremely important one. Not only was the individual to examine the offering but the priest was also. The church no longer has a priestly system that examines individual lives to see if they meet a godly standard. Instead we have family, neighbors, fellow workers and even strangers we meet who examine the way we act, the things we say and the attitude we show, and they decide if we are truly living what we profess. We are in *position* without blemish because we have been made clean by Jesus but would those we come in contact with each day declare us as without blemish?

Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus and reminded them that because of the provision of Jesus on the Cross they have *positionally* been made holy and without blemish so they can be adopted into the family of God but with that comes the challenge to *progressively* become more like that in our every day walk. How are we doing? What areas do we need to work on, so our daily walk reflects likeness of Jesus? How are we doing daily as we seek to display that likeness to those we are in contact with each day?