

“A Call to Holiness (amidst a messy church)”

Dawlish Christian Fellowship Virtual Church – 25 October 2020

Reading: Ephesians 4 v17-32

Message: Guy Huggins

Introduction

This is Number 5 in our series looking at Ephesians. The title I was given to speak on was ‘Messy church’, but after pressing into the Bible passage and prayer, I’ve adjusted the title to: “A call to holiness (amidst a messy church)” and focussing on the work of the Holy Spirit in leading a Godly, spirit filled life.

Paul’s letter to Ephesians has many touch points around this theme.

- **Chapter 1:** there are reminders of **Spiritual Blessings** available to us and then a prayer for **Spiritual Wisdom**
- **Chapter 2:** v1 to 3 reminds us of **sin**, its source and the dangers: *‘Once you were dead because of your disobedience and your many sins. ² You used to live in sin, just like the rest of the world, obeying the devil—the commander of the powers in the unseen world. He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God. ³ All of us used to live that way, following the passionate desires and inclinations of our sinful nature. By our very nature we were subject to God’s anger, just like everyone else.*
- Then in v4 to 5 reminds us of the **work of grace**: *⁴ But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much, ⁵ that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God’s grace that you have been saved!)*
- Further on how we are a **temple of the Lord** through indwelling of His Spirit
- **Chapter 3:** wonderful prayer for **Spiritual Growth** in v16-18
- **Chapter 4: unity of the body of Christ**, with the Holy Spirit as the connector. Also the enabling of **spiritual leadership gifts** – 5 fold ministry as it is known: Apostles (A), Prophets (P), Evangelists (E), Shepherd / Pastors (S) and Teachers (T) – this scripture is foundational to our future vision and ministry for DCF
- Then there is our passage today which about how we should **conduct** ourselves and is very similar and perhaps should be read with Colossians 3 v1-17 and Galatians 5 from v16.
- **Chapter 5:** on a similar theme picks up **‘living as Children of Light’** and **‘living by the Spirits power’**, with how to live well as husband and wife
- **Chapter 6:** picks up wider relationships and then of course the famous passage on the **armour** of God in the midst of **spiritual warfare**

Anyway, let’s dig into our passage for today. Would be good to have your Bibles ready and to help you there are sermon notes for you saved in a PDF on our website.


Before I go any further, I would like to pray.


The Reading Ephesians 4 v17-32 (NLT)

The reading itself is fairly self explanatory – it is what it says on the can! A message to the church, as messy as it is, to **throw off your old nature, put on your new nature** through a **renewal of the Holy Spirit**.

Let's go through the reading and unpack a few elements. It falls neatly into **3 parts or sections**:

Part 1: Verses 17 to 19







(Ephesians 4 v 17-19 (NLT))

¹⁷ With the Lord's authority I say this: Live no longer as the Gentiles do, for they are hopelessly confused. ¹⁸ Their minds are full of darkness; they wander far from the life God gives because they have closed their minds and hardened their hearts against him. ¹⁹ They have no sense of shame. They live for lustful pleasure and eagerly practice every kind of impurity.

We are by nature people who like to wander and drift, we are influenced greatly by the world around us. Verses 17 to 19 are a reminder of our fallen world and the temptations and self-absorption around us.

Part 2: Verses 20 to 24





(Ephesians 4 v 20-24 (NLT))

²⁰ But that isn't what you learned about Christ. ²¹ Since you have heard about Jesus and have learned the truth that comes from him, ²² throw off your old sinful nature and your former way of life, which is corrupted by lust and deception.

²³ Instead, let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes. ²⁴ Put on your new nature, created to be like God - truly righteous and holy.

'But' (= always a word that means there is an important truth coming), that is not the way we should think or act as followers of Jesus.


What simple, powerful imagery – we are to **'throw off our old nature'** (not ease out of – but to discard with energy and intention). In some translations it says 'throw off the old man', an easier way to understand the word nature is 'conduct'. So instead **put on your new nature** – note the way this is worded – we already have this new nature – it's ours – we've inherited it - we just need to believe it and walk in it! Like choosing clothes to put on in the morning – will I choose a smart suit or filthy rags? As Paul's letter to the Galatians says:


Galatians 2v20: *"My old self has been crucified with Christ! It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me".*

Throw off – put on!! How? By letting the Holy Spirit renew our thoughts and attitudes – His Spirit – His power – our choice!

Part 3: Verses 25-32

“So”..(another word) - because of what Jesus did, and His work of grace, the reading then goes on to list examples of **our old nature** and **compare with what our new nature should be**. These are just examples and should not be seen as an exhaustive list. (already mentioned lust and sexual sin in v19)



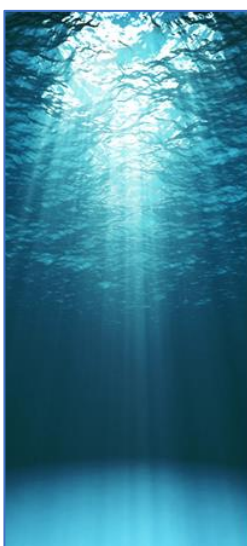



(Ephesians 4 v 25-29 (NLT))

25 So stop telling lies. Let us tell our neighbours the truth, for we are all parts of the same body. 26 And “don’t sin by letting anger control you.” Don’t let the sun go down while you are still angry, 27 for anger gives a foothold to the devil.

28 If you are a thief, quit stealing. Instead, use your hands for good hard work, and then give generously to others in need.

29 Don’t use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them.





(Ephesians 4 v 30-32 (NLT))

30 And do not bring sorrow to God’s Holy Spirit by the way you live. Remember, he has identified you as his own, guaranteeing that you will be saved on the day of redemption.

31 Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behaviour.

32 Instead, be kind to each other, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.

Old nature (our old conduct)	New nature (our new conduct)
Telling lies	Being truthful
Anger that controls and festers	Dealing with anger in a timely way
Stealing	Don’t steal, instead use your hands for good work, then give to others rather than taking from them
Swearing or using words to tear others down	Wholesome words that will encourage and build people up
Living in a way that will bring sorrow to the Holy Spirit (the old self)	Living in a way that honours God’s redemptive work
Bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, slander	Be kind to each other, tender-hearted, forgiving one another as Christ has forgiven you
‘all types of evil behaviour’ – fill in the blanks – these are the shameful things that you would rather people didn’t know about!	Get rid!!

As I said, the reading and teaching is very clear! I want to spend the rest of this time looking **at three things in the context of this ‘Call to Holiness’**:

1. **Holiness Matters!**
2. **The Holiness Minefield** – and practical ways that we can navigate through it
3. **A Holiness Moment** – I want to allow reflection time for us to ask the Holy Spirit to reveal areas in our lives that we need to deal with His help.

1 Holiness Matters

What does Holy mean? To be set apart (for God), sacred, sanctified.

AW Tozer said *“Holy is the way God is. To be holy He does not conform to a standard. He is that standard.”*

Some refer to God’s holiness as ‘Otherness’ – there is no one like Him!

Andy Hawthorne (Message Trust) in his book ‘Here I am’ puts it like this: *“after an awakening to His presence comes the confrontation of the true character – His goodness, His otherness. A being of epic proportion, a God worthy of our obedience and service”. “Our only possible reaction to an encounter with the holiness of God is a heart piercing realisation of our own sinfulness”.*

He says to his team at the Message Enterprise Centre *“the most important thing you can bring to work is holiness”*

Holiness matters!

We preach so much about the God’s love and this is really important but it is not the done thing these days to preach about God’s judgement – too uncomfortable! But both represent truth. A helpful illustration that is often used is that of a coin – one side saying ‘love’, the other ‘judgement’ – two sides of the same coin.

Matthew 10 v28: *²⁸ “Don’t be afraid of those who want to kill your body; they cannot touch your soul. Fear only God, who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Note: Hell is real – Jesus said so!*

Leviticus 11v40 and 1 Peter 1v16: *“...be holy, because I am holy”.*

1 Corinthians 6 v12-20 – specially addresses sexual sin. Picking up from verse 18. *¹⁸ Run from sexual sin! No other sin so clearly affects the body as this one does. For sexual immorality is a sin against your own body. ¹⁹ Don’t you realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? You do not belong to yourself, ²⁰ for God bought you with a high price. So you must honour God with your body.*

Romans 12 v1 and 2: famous passage our bodies being a living sacrifice: *I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him. ² Don’t copy the behaviour and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God’s will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.*

Holiness matters!

Quiz time: how many of you can recite John 10v10 and James 4v8 off the top of your heads? I’ve you a few seconds to think about that.....

John 10 v10: I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

James 4v8: ⁸ Come near to God and he will come near to you.

No, these are incorrect quotes!! How often we take the ‘nice bits’ of Bible verses or take them out of context – even put them on greeting cards. These are quotes are in the context of spiritual warfare and avoiding sin.

John 10 v10: ***The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.***

James 4v8: *Come near to God and he will come near to you. **Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.***

If we don’t take this seriously it will steal our joy, hinder our relationship with God, our prayer life, our ministry and kingdom impact. Every major revival has occurred where there has been true repentance and a move back towards God.

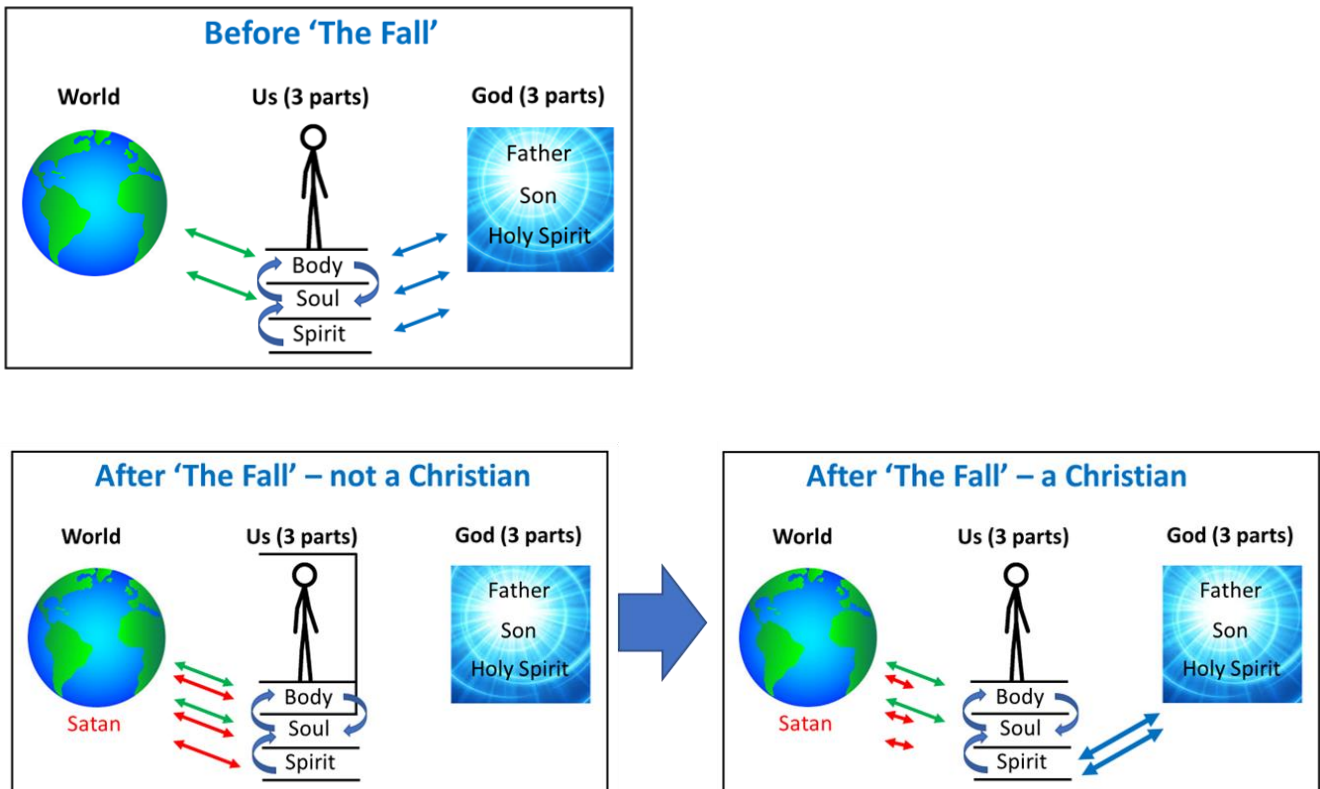
Holiness Matters!!!

2 The Holiness Minefield

We live in a tough world with many distractions and temptations – how are we supposed to navigate through what can seem like a minefield?

A few years ago back at the old building I preached on Sanctification and used the illustration of a sunflower – how I love driving through France and seeing the fields with thousands of sunflowers all basking in the sun – where the sun moves the head of the sunflower reorientates to the maximum sunshine. The more sunshine, the better the seeds and oil. I paralleled this to the Christian faith – the more we keep in the light and facing the light (Jesus Light of the World) the more we will grow to more and more like Him – “sanctification like a sunflower!”

I'm going to show you a much deeper illustration that will hopefully be transformational in your walk of holiness. I wish I had grasped this years ago – it would have saved a lot of mess ups! (See diagram)



We worship a Triune God: God the **Father**, God the **Son** and God the **Holy Spirit**.

Look in 1 Thessalonians 5 v23: *Now may the God of peace make you holy in every way, and may your whole **spirit** and **soul** and **body** be kept blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ comes again.*

This is a complex topic but many believe in line with 1 Thessalonians and other parts of Scripture that we are triune as well – **Body**, **Soul** and **Spirit**.

Body (σῶμα soma) = the bits you can see – our physical nature

Soul (ψυχή psyche) = the bits you can't see – how we relate to humanity – what we think, feel, our personality, attitudes and beliefs

Spirit (πνεῦμα pneuma) = how we relate in the spiritual or supernatural realms – how we communicate with God directly

Soul and **Spirit** are very hard to get our heads around because they are so closely connected - in Hebrews 4 v12 we learn: *For the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between **soul** and **spirit**, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires.*

So, go about our everyday business where our Soul interacts with our bodies and vice versa – our thoughts and feelings drive what we do and how we act

In Genesis, after the 'Fall' where we rebelled against God, we were cut off from God. We are lost, our instruction comes from a fallen sinful world. We go through life sinning and pleasing ourselves. This creates

pathways for more sin and also we receive physical and emotional scars. Sometimes these open pathways can lead to very dark experiences and addictions.

When we believe that Jesus is the Son of God, that he paid the ultimate price by dying on a cross (in our place) to atone for our sin and we say sorry and repent, we are born again into God's royal family. We are Christians, we will spend eternity in Heaven with God rather than in hell separated from God. As a sign of this transformation we get baptised to show that the old life (old self) has gone and the new life has come.

BELIEVE – REPENT – BE BAPTISED.

So the gateway to God has been opened up again – but in order to maintain a healthy walk with God we communicate in **spirit** with the help of the Holy Spirit making sure we use the Bible for truth and stay connected by prayer.

As Christians when we sin, we are ignoring this new heavenly spiritual pathway and we are reverting back to listening to the world. The best way to avoid sinning is:

1. Stop
2. Recognise that you are about to sin
3. expose it for what it is – satan has come to steal and destroy
4. refocus your attention on God and pray for help. Use and proclaim God's Word.
5. If this doesn't work and you are really under spiritual attack – you contact a Christian friend so they can pray with you.

Please, remember this diagram, the pathway from the world and the pathway to relate with God. I hope that was helpful.

3 A Holiness Moment

I don't know how your holiness journey is going? Is it well with your Soul?

Shortly I'm going to invite you to have a 'Holiness Moment'. An opportunity to ask God what needs to be **'thrown off' and what needs to be 'put on'?** Also if you are watching and you aren't a Christian or you are not sure that you have really met Jesus at the cross, said sorry and committed to walking a new life under the kingship of Jesus – there will be an opportunity for you to do this.

Maybe in your Christian walk there are a few routine things that need a spring clean.

Maybe you have some big things to deal with that just won't go away, that have damaged you and are dragging you down. Before we have a reflection time, I want to speak directly to you. You know some things are absolutely our own fault and stupidity. **But** some things are a by-product of stuff that has happened in our lives or have been done to us. Someone else's actions.

If you think of the analogy of driving a car through life. Most of the time we are in the driving seat – we have free will. We can choose whether to take directions from God or not. But sometimes someone else is in the driving seat – we didn't ask them there – they took our car and decided where they were going to go. This has caused us pain that wasn't our doing. I didn't choose to be deserted by my biological parents, I didn't choose to be dumped in an orphanage – but it happened! The far-reaching consequences of identity, anxiety, belonging and rejection that have caused me to sin or struggle many times. On the flip side, I can see the hand of God in sending me adopted parents to rescue me, to love and care for me, to bring me up in a Christian home.

If you are in emotional pain, you are scarred, or you are struggling and chained up in repetitive sin – my prayer is that you will be **set free this morning**.

Jesus promises that if you confess or open up about these things and surrender them to Him, you will be set free, you will find a peace that nothing else in this world can offer.

Irrespective of where we are, it is our choice to do something about it. As an Indian Pastor once said to me **"my heart, my responsibility"**.

My prayer for you today is that you will do business with God right now and be able to say "it is well with my soul".

Throw off the old self, put on our new nature by letting the Holy Spirit renew our minds and attitudes

Reflection time and prayer

Prayer: (that we would welcome the Holy Spirit to come and move through our spirit into our soul (our thoughts and feelings) – open our hands and our hearts to receive)

In the quiet, ask the Lord to reveal things to you that need to be dealt with.

Psalm 139 v23 - 24: *Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. ²⁴ Point out anything in me that offends you, and lead me along the path of everlasting life.*

1 John 1 v8 – 9: *If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth. ⁹ But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness.*

[space / time to reflect – reinforce God’s love and His mercies are new every morning]

Prayer: for those who need a gentle spring clean

Prayer: for those in pain or need chains breaking over repetitive sin

Prayer: for salvation for those who don’t know Jesus or those that need to recommit

[space / time reflect / respond]

Sermon close and blessing:

1 Thessalonians 5v23: *May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Psalm 19 v14: *May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.*

Additional tools

Two helpful additional tools that you can use to identify areas that need addressing in your journey towards holiness:

Danielle Strickland recommends before you go to sleep every night reflect on the day that has been and ask:

1. What moved me closer to God today? – give thanks
2. What moved me further away from God today? – say sorry

Pete Grieg (author of Red moon rising 24-7 prayer, How to Pray and Dirty Glory) recommends the early church spiritual disciplines, prayer and practice called Examen - at the end of every day reflect on:

1. **Replay:** replay in your mind what happened during the day
2. **Repent:** say sorry for what went wrong
3. **Rejoice:** celebrate what went well
4. **Reboot:** start afresh the next day

Nick Page in his book 'Dark Night of the Shed' says: "God knows all about you, but God is interested in what you haven't told Him yet". God knows, but he longs to hear you identify it and say it. It helps us deal with our 'shadow side', the bits that no one else sees or that we don't want to own up to. It helps us deal with the false narratives we have about ourselves and our perspective of God.