

Preacher: Pastor Twyla

Scripture: Ephesians 1:3-14

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.

Did you ever do something or say something you regret having done or said—the kind of thing that haunts you—thinking about it from time to time and wishing it would go away. Maybe, you're afraid someone will find out about it. Maybe, you've asked God for forgiveness, but it still bothers you. You wish you could just tear it up into little pieces and throw it away, or simply send it through a shredder, or better yet burn it, and it would be gone forever.

Today's text, a letter to the church in Ephesus, speaks to us about this struggle. In the Greek his long passage, verses three through fourteen is one sentence. William Barclay, a commentary writer says, "It is so long and complicated because it represents not so much a reasoned statement as a lyrical song of praise. Paul's mind goes on and on, not because he is thinking in logical stages, but because gift after gift and wonder after wonder from God pass before his eyes."

As we break down this long sentence, the Apostle Paul begins by telling us that when God created man and woman. It was his plan from the very beginning to shower us with all of his love. We are his chosen, adopted children. Think about this: God, the Great Creator, the Holy One, the Father of our Savior, Jesus Christ, wants to do nothing more than to love us and bless us. We are special, precious, and loved.

At the heart of the Bible's message is this lesson of God's love for us; and through his love for us, we are united with each other, both near and far. And as the recipients of God's love, we can be made whole and holy, or as many translations of the bible interpret verse four, we are holy and blameless.

Let's first take a look at that word holy. As it was written in the original language of Greek, the word for holy as it is used here is *hagios*, which always has in it the idea of difference and of separation. A temple is holy because it is different from other buildings. Sundays are holy because they are different from other days of the week, or at least that's the way it's supposed to be; God is supremely holy because God is different from all of humanity.

So, we can conclude, that Paul is telling us that God chose Christians to be different from unbelievers. Our lives should reflect our beliefs, our obedience to God, Christ's presence in our

lives. As a pastor who served in two other congregations, one of the most frustrating things for me was the lack of commitment some members had to being a part of the church.

There was a time that you may remember when the church and participating in the life of the church was very important. It was a priority to attend church and to be involved in church projects and activities. Sadly, that is not the case for many American Christians today.

The tendency in the modern church has been to play down the difference between the Church and the world. We have, in effect, often said to people: "So long as you live a decent, respectable life, it is quite all right to become a Church member and to call yourself a Christian. You don't need to be so very different from other people." But, in fact, a Christian should be distinguishable in the world because Christ rules in their hearts. We were not meant to be taken out of the world, but to live in the world, but live differently. It is the simple fact of the matter that if enough Christians became different in the world, we would transform society.

Now, let's look at another word in this phrase that Paul wrote that word is whole or blameless depending on which bible translation you read. The Greek word for blameless is amomos (amo- (long O) mos). Its meaning is rooted in the fact that it is a sacrificial word. You see in Paul's day, under Jewish law before an animal could be offered as a sacrifice it had to be inspected; and if any blemish was found it was rejected as unfit for an offering to God. Only the best were fit to offer to God.

The use of the word here then considers the total person offering him or herself to God. It thinks of taking every part of our life, work, pleasure, sport, home life, personal relationships, and making them all worthy of being offered to God. This word does not mean that the Christian should settle for being respectable; it means that a Christian must be perfect. To say that the Christian must be amomos is to abandon the feeling of satisfaction with what is second best; it means that the Christian standard seeks nothing less than perfection.

Perfection? Really? Is a Christian supposed to be perfect? If that's the case, then no one could be a Christian. Before you start feeling defeated, consider Paul's words that he said a long time ago: God decided to adopt us into his family through Jesus Christ. His Son served as the unblemished sacrifice for all of our sin, thereby perfecting us in the eyes of God. No, we are not perfect, but the One who was perfect gave everything so that we can stand perfected before God.

There was a boy who did not have much athletic ability. Every time he and his friends would play some game, he was always the last to be chosen. One day two new fellows came to play with them and were allowed to be team captains because they were older. The first team captain chose the boy who had always been chosen last before. Why? Because they were brothers, and he loved his brother. So it is with God. He chose us not because of our abilities or because we are perfect, but because he loves us.

Yes, in spite of our imperfections, God loves us. This truth can be a very hard pill to swallow. It sounds good, but we know that we have made a lot of mistakes over the years. Some of our sin we may consider far too substantial and unforgivable. We think about some of our mistakes over and over again. We ask God for forgiveness every time we think about some of our mistakes. In essence, we chain ourselves to our sin because we just can't seem to let ourselves off the hook.

Sometimes we let our failings become an important part of our identity and we are afraid to let them go because then, just maybe, we won't know who we are. Or we may have held on to our sin for so long that we don't know how to let it go.

What can make it even worse - is when others we may have hurt don't forgive us. So we believe that there is no way we could ever stand perfected before God. If that is what we think,

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then we deny the saving grace of our Lord, Jesus Christ. We refuse the gift of God's forgiveness, because we have decided that we are the judge above all judges, including God.

God's gift of grace is given to us freely. Yes, we may find ourselves wrapped up in the grip and power of sin, but the price Jesus paid for us through his death and resurrection takes us out of the dark power of sin and sets us right as God's adopted children.

Rob Bell, author of the book "Velvet Elvis" tells us this story. "I was having breakfast with my dad and my younger son at the Real Food Café in Grand Rapids, Michigan. As we were finishing our meal, I noticed that the waitress brought our check, then took it away, then brought it back again. She placed it on the table, smiled, and said, 'Somebody in the restaurant paid for your meal. You're all set.' Then she walked away.

I had the strangest feeling of helplessness. There was nothing I could do. To insist on paying would have been pointless. All I could do was trust that what she said was actually true and then live in that – which meant getting up and leaving the restaurant. My acceptance of what she said gave me a choice to live like it was true or to create my own reality in which the bill was not paid.

That is our invitation – to trust that we don't owe anything. To trust that something is already true about us, something has already been done, something has been there all along.

To trust that grace—God's grace—pays the bill. Because of God's grace we have the assurance that we can stand before God holy and blameless. So, if there is something that you cannot forgive yourself for doing or saying, repent, hand it over to Jesus. It's over. Let it go. Amen.