

Holiness

by J. Sidlow Baxter

J. Sidlow Baxter's sermon emphasizes the critical importance of holiness in the life of a believer, rooted in God's eternal choice and love.

Duration: 44:43

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Romans 8:29, 1 Corinthians 1:2, Ephesians 1:4, 1 Thessalonians 4:7, Hebrews 12:14, 1 Peter 1:15-16

Topics: "Holiness"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker begins by recounting a story of a mischievous child who caused a disaster by playing with two important bottles on his mother's tablecloth. The speaker then transitions to discussing the importance of holiness in the lives of believers. He emphasizes that true sanctification is a priority concern for Christians and that it is necessary for pleasing God. The speaker focuses on Ephesians 1:4, highlighting the significance of the verb 'he hath chosen' and explaining its implications in Greek grammar.

Transcript

Paul's Ephesian letter, the first chapter, and the fourth verse. Here then it is. According as he, God, hath chosen, but more latterly, somewhat hypocritically, that's where they went wrong.

They wanted a demonstrative sanctity merely before men. But here, the lay and without God more important than any comment that I can make upon it, before I dare to make my first reverent observation, let's read it deliberately, thoughtfully, observantly once again. According as God hath elected us in him, Christ, before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame, before him in love.

Dear fellow believers, if there is one thing more than another about which all of us blood-bought Christian believers should be continually concerned, it is our inward and outward holiness of heart and life and conduct. Other things may have their due and related importance, but beyond any peradventure, this is our priority concern number one. To unanointed people he calls us to a life and then outwrought holiness.

I are living in the experience and humble exhibition of truly pleasing to our Heavenly Father or to our wonderful Savior or to the Holy Spirit who begat us again to new spiritual life. So I want you to think carefully, sacred matter of holiness. Now, I look at this verse, Ephesians 1-4, and the first thing that strikes me about it is statement of truth.

There is only one verb in it. He hath chosen. Three words in the English, but only one in the Greek, because in the Greek verb always the pronoun he is implicitly present.

Venus and the Earth and Jupiter and Mars and far away Neptune all swing around the huge central firing magnet that we call the sun and receive their illumination from it. So, all else in this verse swings around that illuminative central verb, he hath chosen. Or to put it in perhaps prosaic grammatical terminology, everything else besides this verb in this stupendous text consists of adverbial amplification.

I mean this, if you should ask, how did God choose us? The first adverbial phrase replies, in Him, Christ. God knew that you and I could never make ourselves holy. Holiness attained by self effort.

It is something that we obtain in Christ. So if you should ask, how did God choose us? The first adverbial phrase replies, in Him, Christ. If you should ask, when did God choose us? The second adverbial, before the foundation of the world.

So it isn't likely that during the past 70 years God's purpose has veered round. But to listen to a certain kind of cleric today, you'd rather think that this text reads, God has chosen us to be social workers, educationalists, philanthropists. But it doesn't say that.

It says He has chosen us to be holy. And if you ask, when? The answer is, before the foundation of the world. If you should ask, why did God choose us? The third adverbial amplification replies, in order that we should be holy and without blame, before Him in love.

So that here, in this titanic verse, for such it undoubtedly. And the when, as you and me. You've heard the saying that there can be a world in a word.

And an earthquake in a sob. And a whirlwind in a sigh. And an ocean in a tear.

Well, there can be a volume in a verb. Three quite intriguing features about this verb. Feature number one is this.

In the Greek, it is in what is called the aorist tense. Now in English we have the three tenses of the verb, the past tense. Now, certainly, the aorist tense is one of the punctiliar tenses.

That is, it concentrates something to a point. And it belongs to the past aspect of the verb. Pleatedly, with a kind of never to be re-said that it means once for all.

Not grammatically in itself. But very often taken with its context, that is just its meaning. Now, here we are reading about something that God did.

Not something that He's merely doing now, or something that He was doing then, with continuity. It views the whole of it in one act as something done. And so it has a kind of once for all implication.

God hath chosen us in Christ, aorists. Meaning that His love will never let us down. That's good, isn't it? Or a doubting Tomasina.

You really are trembling. Upon the Lord Jesus you would never dream of trusting other than He. The assurance of faith.

Sometimes you're trusting. Sometimes doubting. Rejoicing.

Sometimes exulting. We are meant to know that we are saved in Christ and saved forever. Well, you can please yourself, but I'm going to rest my grateful head upon that very reassuring pillow.

He chose us in the aorist tense. Once for all. But then, let me mention a second feature about this verb.

Not only is it in the aorist tense, it is in the middle voice. Now I can sympathetically understand somebody will be inwardly asking what on earth is the middle voice. Well, don't despair, I can tell you, the middle voice is the one that comes between the other two.

Fear do Greek. You'll know that I'm not just being playfully facetious. I'm being rather exact.

The middle voice is the one which in a very real way comes between and in some senses coordinates the other two. Let me explicate that a little. In our English grammar we have just the two voices, as we call them, the two voices of the verb.

But we have no middle voice. Now, we say that the verb is in the active voice when the subject does something through the verb to the object. As in the simple sentence, the boy, subject, kicked, in which the subject goes out through the verb, the boy, subject, kicked, which is the verb, the dog, the unhappy object.

We can change the active into the passive. And in the passive voice, the subject instead of doing something through the verb to the object, sustains something through the verb from the predicate. As in the equally simple sentence, the boy, still the subject, was bitten by.

In the Greek, the middle voice has a kind of boomerang. Oh yes, I mustn't forget. Yes, I'm a fellow kangaroo.

I was born in North Sydney, New South Wales. Boomerang effect. In the case of this text, this is the sense of it.

God, there's the subject, hath elected. God hath the privileged objects. And then it swings back.

He hath elected us in Christ to be his very own. Or as Weymouth translates it, to be his peculiar treasure. The mystery of this pre-mundane divine election.

There is the heartbeat of an infinite love from the boundless bosom of a heavenly father. Because he loved us to be his very own. Are you enjoying my Greek class? A feature about this verb, not only is it in the aorist tense and the middle voice, but in the Greek, it is a compound verb, or to be more explicit, it has the preposition ek-prefixed to it.

Now ek or ex means in the Greek, as also it does in the English, it always means out of. But we've used it so much we've turned the verb into... When I excavate, I don't just make a hollow, I hollow out of. Now in this verse, the verb is one of the New Testament ek verbs.

Reminds us, of course, that the very word for the church is ek plesia, the called out one. Now here it says, God hath... Now you're on the edge of precipitous mystery. Now you're treading thin ice.

Are you telling us that God has elected a comparatively infinitesimal little group of people and bypassed all the millions and billions of others and predestinated them to eternal damnation in Gehenna where the fire is never quenched and the worm never dies? Oh, Mr. Preacher, now you're on thin ice, on thin ice. We are on the rock of ages. What the word teaches, neither will we presume to run on before.

The word is here. I'm not just indoctrinating you with what I think. I'm telling you that the word here is God has chosen us out of.

Does that mean then that God has predestinated all others to everlasting damnation? Let him prove it from the Bible, who can? But nobody can. It teaches that when all unconverted people die on this earth, in their disembodied ego, their continuing self-conscious humanhood, in their bodiless condition, they go into Hades, which is the place invisible to us of detention between the death of the body here and the final general judgment of the whole human race at the great white throne. Awesome final assize which is yet to be, It is a judgment.

It's not a whole male consignment of all the millions of the human race who will know of the second death. It is a judgment. It will be an awful judgment.

And the judge can never err. And the judgment is inflexibly righteous. And cases will be tried, and evidence will be weighed, and verdicts will be reached, and sentences will be passed, and destinies will be settled.

And on the other side of that great white throne, if language means anything, there is the fearsome reality badly misunderstood and misrepresented into your minds. And this is something that so far has informed me, seems to have been strangely neglected in the long-continuing controversy between Calvinism and Arminianism. That's something else I won't go into here.

Seem either to have neglected or underestimated that teaching ages sees the end of time right from its beginning. And God who foreknows in advance all the reactions of the human will, both individual and racial, He has superimposed upon the history of the Adamic human race this great purpose that out of the human race there shall be a peculiar people gathered who are the Father's special gift to His Son. The intimate oneness with God the Son that the only way you can express the ineffable union between them and Him is to say He's the head and they're the body.

So it's a living union. He is the bridegroom and they are the bride. So it is a loving union.

He is the foundation and so it is a lasting union. Head and body, husband and wife, foundation and edifice, a living and a loving and a lasting union, an indissoluble bond forever. The ecclesia and God's dear sons, you and I, hell-deserving sinners though we are, we are to be lifted up in union with God's Son above all the marvel of it.

And we are to be the temple through which He is going to express His glory to the worlds of the universe through all the ages to come. Did ever you hear such a thing? That's the meaning of election in the New Testament. Oh, brothers and sisters, it's a big thing to be in union with Christ, isn't it? Did you ever hear of that famous congregational preacher of England? The late Dr. Joseph Potter.

If Jesus Christ knew everything as you say He did, tell me this, why did Jesus Christ go and choose Judas Iscariot who betrayed Him? And Potter hesitated and then deeply moved, he replied, Hey man, I have a bigger question than that. Why did Jesus choose me? Have you never felt like that? There are members of your own family who seem to be among the bypassed. Every day you're working with people to whom the things of Jesus don't mean a thing at all.

Jesus chose me. Why did He choose you? He has chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and without laying before Him in love. He chose you heiress never to let you go.

Doesn't that make you want to be what He chose you to be? Even holy? He chose you middle voice to be His peculiar treasure. Doesn't that make you want to be what He chose you to be? Holy? He chose you mysteriously enough out of. Doesn't that make you want to be what He chose you to be? Oh, how we ought to long for holiness.

Pleasing to this God of mystery who chose us. To which God calls us, challenges us, persuades us, allures us. Take another look at the text.

Let me read it and be ready to answer a simple question. Be holy. What's the next word? Well, there can't be any particular meaning in the little conjunction and.

But there is. In this case, to English K-A-I. And its general meaning in the Greek is and.

But over and over again it has a disjunctive connotation corresponding to our divisive little word but. Indeed, quite often it has the meaning of even or that is or which equals. Now the meaning.

But read it like this. That is without lame. So the holiness to which God calls us in this present is blamelessness.

Blamelessness. Please get hold of that clearly, firmly and finally. The text does not say that we should be holy.

That is without fault. To me is not blamelessness. Go into that a little.

Indeed I am. Very well. What is the difference between faultlessness and blamelessness? Oh, there's a big difference.

Natural powers. Blamelessness has exclusively to do with our motives. But motives are moral through and through.

As to any kind of powers. But God is calling us in the sense of hearts that are clean in desire. And aims that are pure in their nature.

And motives that are upright and loving and good. And aims and desires and clean and true. And is holiness.

There to meet. To be not only fallible but rather gullible. Same.

It is a feminine catastrophe. Distinguish between faultlessness. My dear wife and I. Both of us were brought up in the county of Lancashire, England.

And I'm thinking just now about a dear little Lancashire girly. Who years ago now. One night knowing that her mother had to go out to do some errands.

To warn. It was in the days when all our Lancashire cottages had an open fire drinking meals. And the dear little damsel.

Took her mother's shoes. By the time mother. They were ruined beyond repair.

But did the mother say. Oh you naughty little wretch. Come here and I'll spank you.

How could she? The little girl had made a costly. Mistake. But had she committed a sin? No.
The motive was heavenly. It was the motive of love. Sin.
Mistakes are not. Now I say again. God.
Or physical. Or other perfection. Calling you and me.
To hearts. And blessing. Motive.
And aim. Is holiness. Be inwardly gasping now and saying.
Oh Mr. Preacher. That kind of holiness. If you knew what.
An hereditary bag of weaknesses I am. If you knew what a cage of unclean birds. My mind often seems.
If you knew what a pestilential swamp. Of ungovernable desires. Mr. Preacher.
If you knew the environment. That surrounds me in my daily life. And work.
If you knew my hereditary weaknesses. My pronesses. To yield to temptation.
You know that I could never be holy. In that sense. With all my thoughts.
And desires. And aspirations. And most clean.
And pure. And good. Oh.
That we should be holy. That is without blame. Before God.
And now the text reaches. Its wonderful climax. Before him.
In love. There is the secret. There is the thing that makes it.
Rapturously. May become experientially filled. And continually pervaded.
By the love of God. With that one. It begins to refine us.
To renew us. To cleanse us. Have you never read in the holy word.
Love. Thinketh no ill to its neighbor. Isn't that holiness? Isn't that pure motive? Have you never read this?
Love is the fulfilling of the law.
And if love fulfills the law. Isn't that holiness? Have you never read this in the first epistle of John? He that
loveth. Dwelleth in God.
And God dwelleth. Doesn't just say visit now and then. God.
Isn't that holiness? Doesn't that make you a living temple of the almighty? Oh, listen to this theme. Can't
get to it quickly enough. Where is it? You've all heard it before.
Listen to it again. Love. Suffers long.
But keeps kind. Love never envies anybody else. Love never warms itself.

Never bribes. Love never behaves unseemly. Say, all this is holiness, isn't it? Love seeketh not her own interests.

Love is not provoked. Love never thinks evil. Love rejoices not in iniquity.

But always rejoices in the truth. Love beareth all things. Believeth all things.

That is, believeth all good things are possible. Love hopeth all things. Love endureth all things.

Love never fails. Isn't that holiness? And isn't it? A beautiful photograph of Jesus. Yes, it is.

Gave you a little illustration from Lancashire. Any Yorkshire people here tonight? Leeds in Yorkshire. There used to be.

Maybe still is. Druggy store. And he was a little meddlesome tyrant.

His fingers were always in some mischief or other. Were correspondingly concerned. They used to wag their threatening finger and say, Never you dare to go into the shop when daddy and mummy are not there.

They were awfully scared whether he might get hold of some bottle with poison in it. Well, to a little mind like his, the prohibition constituted the irresistible temptation. And one day when his unsuspecting parents were absent for a little longer than usual, he prowled out of the living room at the rear of the store, went behind the counter, stood upon a nearby box, and reached up to the first shelf of bottles.

And he fixed his eyes and then his hands on two important looking bottles. And then with his double booty, he marched back into the room behind the store. And with those two bottles, he had a millennially happy time upon his mother's best white linen tablecloth.

Holes right through it. Not sure where the greater suffering lay, in her mind or on his anatomy. She began to deal with it.

It was in the days before bendixes and other modern inconveniences. And she didn't have detergents, but she got out her soaps and her bleaches, and to use a good old-fashioned wash day term, she rub-a-dub-dubbed it. Ever hear that before? Three good dowsings in soap and water.

Then she put it through three rinsing waters, and then at last, she hung it out on a line in the backyard, where it gently swayed in the light of the setting sun and the breath of the evening breeze. And I'm glad to report, those big, black, bluey splodges had been completely expunged. The cloth was as white as an angel's wing.

A dozen holes right through it. Despite all they tell you about detergents on the modern television screen, even to this day you can't wash holes out. You get the point.

Metaphorically speaking, sin has made holes in our nature. And the clogging infirmities of our Adamic, hereditary humanity will be with us to our last day on earth. Until this mortal puts on immortality, and death is swallowed up in victory.

But the point I'm making is, that those hereditary impediments, and deteriorations and defects, those, so to speak, those holes in our nature, they do not preclude the possibility that the cloth may be washed clean.

Are you getting it? And the great New Testament call to holiness is this call that you are making.

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