

THE DEAREST PLACE ON EARTH (20)

A Holy Community

A. Introduction

1. The local church is a community of God's people.

2. What kind of community should we be?

When people look at this local church what should they see?

3. They should see a holy community.

"We must be holy, because this is one grand end and purpose for which Christ came into the world... Jesus is a complete Saviour. He does not merely take away the guilt of a believer's sin, he does more – he breaks its power." (JC Ryle)

As well as saving us because He loves us and for His glory, God saves us so that we might be holy.

"For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves." (Ephesians 1:4-6)

"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless." (Ephesians 5:25-27)

B. What is holiness?

1. The word 'Holy' occurs more than 600 times in the Bible (more than 700 if you include holiness, sanctify and sanctification).

It means separation.

When something is holy, it is set apart.

2. God is holy because He is set apart or different from everything that He has made, and especially from all that is evil.

"There is no one holy like the LORD; there is no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God." (1 Samuel 2:2)

"Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory." (Isaiah 6:3)

"This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all." (1 John 1:5)

3. We are called to be holy because God is holy.

"I am the LORD your God; consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy. Do not make yourselves unclean by any creature that moves about on the ground. I am the LORD who brought you up out of Egypt to be your God; therefore be holy, because I am holy." (Leviticus 11:44-45)

"As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy." (1 Peter 1:14-16)

C. Are we a holy community?

1. In Christ we have been made holy (definitive sanctification).

“And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.” (1 Corinthians 6:11)

“We have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.” (Hebrews 10:10)

Yet we are called to grow in holiness (progressive sanctification).

“Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.” (Hebrews 12:14)

2. Holy is what we are and what we must become and what we one day will perfectly be.

“Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.” (1 John 3:2)

D. What does a holy community look like?

1. It's a community that is in the process of putting to death sin.

“Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness.” (Romans 6:12-13)

“But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.” (Colossians 3:8-10)

“You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.” (Ephesians 4:22-24)

2. It's a community that is seeking to obey everything Jesus commands.

“Jesus replied, “If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. He who does not love me will not obey my teaching.” (John 14:23-24)

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” (Matthew 28:19-20)

3. It's a community that is different from the world around them.

“Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world.” (1 John 2:15-16)

4. It's a community that is becoming more and more like Christ.

“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.” (Romans 8:28-29)

E. Why should we be a holy community?

1. Jesus motivates us in a number of ways to pursue holiness.
2. Here is a selection of the encouragements to be holy (taken from The Hole in our Holiness by Kevin DeYoung).

It is our duty (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

It is right (Ephesians 6:1).

It is for our own good (Deuteronomy 12:28)

God's example (Ephesians 4:32).

Christ's example (Ephesians 5:2).

Assurance of salvation (2 Peter 1:10).

To be effective as a Christian (2 Peter 1:8).

Because Jesus will return (2 Peter 3:11-12).

Because the world is not our home (1 Peter 2:11).

To win over our neighbours (1 Peter 2:12).

For the public good (Matthew 5:13).

For the sake of our prayers (1 Peter 3:7).

Because of the futility of sin (Matthew 6:27).

Because of the folly of sin (Matthew 7:26-27).

The promise of future grace (Matthew 6:33).

The promise of future judgment (Romans 12:19).

The fear of future judgment (Hebrews 10:26-27).

The good example of others (Hebrews 13:7).

The bad examples of others (1 Corinthians 10:6).

God is the master and we are His servants (Luke 17:10).

The fear of the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:11).

The love of the Lord (1 John 4:11).

In gratitude for grace (Romans 12:1).

For the glory of God (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

Because God is holy (Leviticus 11:44-45).

To please God (Hebrews 13:16).

To avoid the devil's snare (Ephesians 4:26-27).

Because Christ has all authority (Matthew 28:16-20).

Because we love Christ (John 14:15).

F. Is holiness possible?

1. In this life we will never be perfectly holy, but we can genuinely please God.

"In the land of Uz there lived a man whose name was Job. This man was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil." (Job 1:1)

"In the time of Herod king of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah; his wife Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron. Both of them were upright in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commandments and regulations blamelessly." (Luke 1:6)

2. We need to understand that through Christ our obedience and good works, although they are not flawless, can and will please God.

"He is not hard to please, though He may be hard to satisfy. He expects of us only what He has Himself first supplied. He is quick to mark every simple effort to please Him, and just as quick to overlook imperfections when He knows we meant to do His will." (AW Tozer)

G. How can we be a holy community?

1. We cannot be holy apart from faith in Christ.

In Christ we are dead to sin, alive to righteousness.

"Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus." (Romans 6:8-11)

In Christ we have been set free from slavery to sin and now have a new master.

"But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life." (Romans 6:22)

In Christ we are new creations.

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" (2 Corinthians 5:17)

2. We cannot be holy apart from the work of the Holy Spirit.

He exposes sin so we can recognise it and turn away.

"But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counsellor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned." (John 16:7-11)

He illuminates God's Word so we can understand what it means and what it requires us to do.

"In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us." (1 Corinthians 2:11-12)

He empowers us so that we can resist sins we couldn't resist before and do the good things that we couldn't do before.

"For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God." (Romans 8:13-14)

He transforms us so we become like the One we behold.

“And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.” (2 Corinthians 3:18)

3. We cannot be holy apart from effort.

We are to work hard to be holy.

“Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.” (Philippians 2:12-13)

“But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.” (1 Corinthians 15:10)

H. Why is our holiness vital?

1. Our holiness is evidence of our salvation.

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.” (Matthew 7:21)

“Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.” (1 Corinthians 6:9-10)

“We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands. The man who says, “I know him,” but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him.” (1 John 2:3-4)

2. Our holiness is essential for our evangelism.

A worldly church can never reach the world.

Case study: Lot (Genesis 19; 2 Peter 2:7-8)

Case study: 1 Peter 2:9-12; 3:1-6; 3:15-16