

Pursue Holy Relationships
November 8, 2020

One day years ago, I needed to take some papers to the church clerk. Her daughters were off school that day for snow. When I finished talking to the clerk I went outside to my car. Two of the daughters and a neighbor girl were playing outside. There was a huge puddle that had frozen and now had a dusting of snow on it. They were running and sliding across the ice. I joined them and started running and sliding on the ice too.

At one point, the neighbor girl asks me what I do. I told her I was a pastor. She did not know what that was. She went to a Roman Catholic church. One of the other girls said, "You know, like a priest."

The girl said, "Oh." She thought a moment, still looking puzzled, and then looked up at me and asked, "And you play?"

I don't know whether it was the idea that adults don't play or pastors don't play. It is true that some people treat me different because I am a pastor. Most non-church folk act awkward around pastors. They don't know what to talk about.

The truth is pastors are not different than other Christians. But Christians are to be different from non-Christians. Christians are called to be holy.

1 Peter 1:15 (NIV) But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do;

We are working with a basic meaning of holiness as different from. God is holy because he is so different from us. We become holy as we grow to be different from the non-Christian culture around us.

Peter goes beyond a general command to be holy. He is specific. "Be holy in all you do." This short sermon series is highlighting some of the areas of life in which we should be holy, different for God and from the world. Last week we looked at money and possessions. That is a large part of our lives.

Another large part of our lives is our relationships. **"All you do" includes our relationships.**

We are in relationship with each person we know. This includes family, extended family of relatives, friends, coworkers, teachers and students at school, and neighbors. Our relationships cover all the people with whom we come into contact week to week.

How do we make our relationships holy? The model for how is seen in the new relationship that formed when people first became Christians. Before Jesus called some to be his disciples, they were not in relationship to each other. They were all Jews, but most of them did not know each other before becoming Jesus' disciples.

Even after they became his disciples they were not in a holy relationship with each other. Rather, they competed with each other.

Luke 9:46 (NIV) An argument started among the disciples as to which of them would be the greatest.

They all wanted and expected to be Jesus' right hand man when Jesus became king. Each thought himself to be the best disciple of Jesus. And they even openly argued with each other about this.

Jesus allowed this undercurrent to exist for awhile. In that passage he goes on to say something about humility. Then, on the night before the cross he told them what he expected of them in the future. First, he humbled himself and washed their dirty feet. This is in John 13. He said to them after he was done.

John 13:13-17 (NIV) "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.

And then a bit later that same night he said this.

John 13:34 (NIV) A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.

What does it mean to love someone? In this context it is not about feelings. This is not an emotional love or a romantic love. This is a caring love, a kind and compassionate love. This love means to care about others and do what is best for them. That takes a compassionate, humble spirit in us. It is a love that sacrifices self to help another.

It is this kind of love Jesus calls his followers to in all of our relationships with others. It is this kind of love we see demonstrated in the first church as they were led by the Holy Spirit.

Acts 2:44-45 (NIV) All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need.

How many of your possessions are you willing to sell so a church member can make a mortgage payment? That is the picture of what was taking place. This was something radical, something unique, something very different. It was in response to what God was doing in them. This is what made this new relationship holy.

The Jews did not live this way. The Romans did not live this way. This was a work of God in them as they gave themselves fully to God. That is what holiness is, giving yourself fully to God.

Elsewhere in the New Testament, other relationships are mentioned in which we are to live out this kind of holiness.

Christians are to have holy marriages.

If you look up categories or subjects of jokes, one big one is marriage. There are more marriage jokes that you could count. And they usually imply that marriage gets worse as a couple gets older. These jokes speak of men being lazy, women being nags, with lots of arguing between them.

Well even if that is true of most marriages, it should not be true of Christian marriages, two Christians married to each other. If your spouse is not a Christian, your marriage is at a disadvantage. And the common perceptions about long-term marriages may be more true of yours than you would like.

Christian marriages should get better as they age. But to do that we must submit ourselves to what God commands us as Christian husbands and wives.

Ephesians 5:25-26 (NIV) Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy...

Husbands, we need to be holy husbands. We need to become men of God, living with Christ, led by the Spirit, shaped by the Spirit. We need to be looking out for our wives, anticipating their needs, giving emotional and spiritual support as it is needed.

Christian wives have a similar role toward the husbands. How we live out those roles are different. But both are to be characterized by love.

Christians are to have holy marriages. Second, **Christians are to be holy parents**.

Raising children is a long, hard job. It takes sacrifice. It takes thinking and study. It often takes more patience than we have, more wisdom than we possess, and more courage than we can muster. So we are tempted to do what is easy to do, what is less stressful, what is less likely to get a negative reaction from our child or teen.

However, when we do that no one is happy. The child is not happy. God is not happy. We are not happy. And the long-term consequences of such behavior on our part will only bring us troubles as the child gets older. Some of you know this when you see a parent giving into a tantrum child in the store. You have learned that appeasement now will bring trouble down the road.

God calls us to be better parents than most people take the trouble to be.

Ephesians 6:4 (NIV) Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

Now that last part does not mean to drag your children to church. Even less does it mean to drop them off at Sunday School and you go back home. It means to live out the Gospel in the home. Live out the humility all Christians should have before them. I was preaching on this many years ago and a woman told me afterwards that she had regrettably never apologized to her children for anything.

Parents, the primary teacher of the gospel to your children is not me, the pastor, or their Sunday School teachers. YOU are to be the primary teacher of the gospel to them. If they don't see you living a holy life, why would you ever expect them to do so? They are not likely to love Jesus more than mom and dad, and more so dad.

Christians are to be holy children (teens included).

Colossians 3:20 (NIV) Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.

The word children includes the teens, and even adults to some extent. Obey your parents in everything. Obey them when they are right. Obey them when they are wrong. Obey them when they don't make

sense. Obey them when they disagree with your argument. Obey them if they are Christians or if they are not Christians.

How you obey them is also important for holiness. Obey them with a humble, submissive attitude, a respectful attitude. Not with a sigh, a rolling of the eyes, a verbal "Whatever!", pouting, or whining. All such actions show disrespect even while you may be obeying the command.

I know that that is asking an awful lot. But that's what a holy follower of Jesus does. Do it for God. That is the meaning of holiness, to live fully for God.

If you do this, your parents will probably faint from the shock and wonder what you are up to. It will take a while of being consistent before they really believe the change. Hang in there and you will see their attitude change towards you. They will start bragging to their friends and coworkers about the great kids they have.

Christians are to be holy friends and neighbors. (This includes work and school.)

Matthew 5:44 (NIV) But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you...

If we are to love our enemies all the more is it true to love our non-enemies and our friends. That doesn't leave anyone out. There is no one we are not to be kind and compassionate and helpful towards. In this way, we will be different from most people in the world. Loving people with Jesus we will be holy. This will bring glory to the name of Jesus.

The best thing we can do for any person is to communicate to them the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ. The reason this is the best thing is because this good news is the answer to eternal life with God.

God has revealed to us the way to eternal life. You must believe yourself to be a sinner deserving of death and hell. You must admit to God that you need Jesus to save you from that outcome. Believing this about yourself and Jesus you must put your life into his hands, receiving him as Savior and Lord of your life.

I urge you to do so today. Say a simple prayer of commitment to him this morning. It is not the prayer that saves you and gains you eternal life. You must truly give yourself to Jesus.