

Sermon to the saints of God assembled at Topeka – Sunday, December 29, 2019

A couple Sundays ago, brother Ben preached a wonderful sermon on the Holiness of God. In that sermon, Ben put us in remembrance, among many other things, that the work of sanctification, or holiness upon the heart of a person is solely the work of our Holy God:

“He ‘hath set apart him that is godly for Himself.’ (Psalm 4:3). And He promised us that He will finish that good work that He started: ‘Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.’ (Philippians 1:6)”

We are also provoked by plain, clear language – throughout the scriptures - to a practical holiness. It is a holiness, or sanctification of God in our hearts, as manifested by both our outward conversation and our inward thinking.

Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord: - Heb. 12:14

But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy. – 1Pet. 1:15,16

Gill: Not internal holiness, but supposes it; for that is God's work, and not the creature's act; it is the sanctification of the Spirit, of which he is the author; this they were chosen unto from the beginning, and made partakers of in regeneration; but external holiness, holiness of life and conversation, both with respect to God and men, in matters both of religion and civil life: and to be holy in this sense is an imitating of Christ, a copying after him, though he is far from being equaled by a sinful creature, or even by an angel in heaven.

Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure. – 1John 3:2,3

There is difference also between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman careth for the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit: but she that is married careth for the things of the world, how she may please her husband. – 1Cor. 7:34

But a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate; - Titus 1:8

Separated out in our minds toward God - constant in all religious exercises: in our closets, around and with any family we are housed amongst, and within the whole church.

Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, - 2Pet. 3:11

Gill: Not as the scoffers and profane sinners, who put away this evil day far from them, but as men, who have their loins girt, and their lights burning, waiting for their Lord's coming; being continually in the exercise of grace, and in the discharge of their religious duties, watching, praying, hearing, reading; living soberly, righteously, and godly; guarding against intemperance and worldly mindedness, and every worldly and hurtful lust.

Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty. Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. - 2Cor. 6:17,18, 7:1

This practical holiness is the self-disciplining of the mind and heart toward God. Gill: *by "the filthiness of the flesh" is meant external pollution, defilement by outward actions, actions committed in the body, whereby the man is defiled; such as all impure words, filthiness, and foolish and mean talking, all rotten and corrupt communication, which defile a man's own body; as the tongue, a little member, when so used does. By "filthiness of the spirit" is meant internal pollution, defilement by the internal acts of the mind, such as evil thoughts, lusts, pride, secret malice and envy, covetousness, and the like:*

In this hurrying, bustling world of immediacy and instant gratification, where we too often get swept up by the secular and vocational affairs of this life, let us stand still for a brief while and consider the matter of practical holiness, as we are commanded to by God's word. And please consider these thoughts as we proceed. This is a topic that is needful, but not always popular. When either framed poorly or received with an improper spirit, phrases like 'self-righteousness' or 'holier-than-thou' can creep into the mind at the topic's mention. My investigation into this topic began because my conscience is thoroughly convicted of my own failures here. In culling my own walk with God, I believe the concepts that I will attempt to flesh out this morning are seasonable and profitable – and it is my hope that some will find the same for their souls. So, let us examine the topic of practical holiness plainly - both as to what it looks like and some reasons why it is so needful. In conclusion, I will offer a few words on the only way in which holiness can be attained.

First, let us paint at least one picture of what true practical holiness looks like. This attempt will be imperfect and incomplete, so please bear with me. Using the scriptures as our guide, I also drew from several sources in looking into practical holiness – a lot of what I will go through today is adapted from different works and sermons from J.C. Ryle, but also Poole and a few others. So, what does attaining unto practical holiness look like?

I. Holiness is the habit of being of one mind with God, as we find His mind described in Scripture. It is the habit of agreeing in God’s judgement: hating what He hates, loving what He loves and measuring everything in this world by the standard of His Word. He who most entirely agrees with God, in the inner man – not in mere public agreement - he is the most holy man.

II. A holy man will do the work to eschew evil and run from every known sin and to keep every known commandment. He will have a desire to know what God’s judgment is on every matter because of a desire to *do His will*. He will have a greater fear of displeasing Him than of displeasing the world, and a great love to all His ways. The man who practices and aspires unto holiness will feel as do our brothers Paul and David:

For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: - Rom. 7:22

Therefore I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right; and I hate every false way. – Ps. 119:128

III. A holy man will strive to be like our Lord Jesus Christ. He will not only live the life of faith in Him, and draw from Him all his daily peace and strength, but he will also labor to have the mind of Christ and to be “conformed to the image of His Son” (Romans 8:29). He won’t look for his peace from other men, or from his bank account, or from his outward circumstance; nor will he get his strength from his own wisdom, nor from his accomplishments, nor from relationships with other men. A holy man will make it a specific aim to forebear with and forgive others, even as Christ forgave us; to be unselfish, even as Christ pleased not Himself; to walk in sincere love, even as Christ loved us. A holy man will discipline himself to be lowly-minded and humble, even as Christ made Himself of no reputation and humbled Himself. He will remember that Christ was a faithful witness and aspire to that. Like Christ, he will deny himself in order to minister unto others; he will meekly and patiently take the wrong of undeserved insults. Like Christ, he will be full of compassion toward sinners, he will be bold and uncompromising in preaching against sin. Like Christ, he will not seek the praise of men, even though he could have it – (nor will it move him when men try to heap it upon him, as it does nearly all other men). He is separate

from worldly people (in action and in mind). He continues instant in prayer, and he will not let even his nearest relations stand in his way when God's work is always there, to be done heartily. All these things a holy man will try to remember. The person who aspires to holiness will emulate and obey Christ in all ways that a person can:

He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked. – 1Jn. 2:6

For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: - 1Pet. 2:21

Happy is the man who has learned to make Christ his "all", both for salvation and in example of walk! A lot of time would be saved, and a lot of sin prevented, if men would more often ask themselves the question, "What would Christ have said and done, if He were in my place?" We're not talking about WWJD bracelets here – or a fair shew. We are talking about asking the question in earnest, finding the answer and then applying it. You can't rightly divide, or apply, something you don't know to apply or even recognize the application for.

IV. A holy man will seek after meekness, long-suffering, gentleness, patience, and the government of his tongue. He will bear much, forbear much, overlook much (which is a thing that most men need to double down in their working at), and be slow to talk of standing upon his rights or of the offenses he has endured.

V. A holy man will seek after charity and brotherly kindness. He will endeavor to do as he would have men do to him and speak as he would have men speak to him. He will be full of affection towards his brethren - towards their bodies, their property, their characters, their feelings, their souls.

Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. – Rom. 13:8

He will hate lying (especially in himself), slandering, backbiting, dishonesty, and unfair dealing, even in the least of things. The shekel of the holy man will weigh a bit more and his cubit will be a bit longer, that he may always deal fairly and justly with other men. He will strive to adorn his religion by his outward demeanor and to make it lovely and beautiful in the eyes of all around him. Not vainly, nor as a man pleaser - but as a true adornment of his faith and walk. What condemning words the Lord gives us:

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing. – 1Cor. 13:1-3

VI. A holy man will follow after a spirit of mercy and benevolence towards others. He will not stand idle. He will not be content with doing no harm - he will try to do good. He will strive to be useful in his day, and to lessen the temporal and spiritual wants and misery around him, as far as he can (whether with money, talent, time or spiritual ministering). We see such examples in Dorcas and Paul:

Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas: this woman was full of good works and almsdeeds which she did. – Acts 9:36

And I will very gladly spend and be spent for you; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved. – 2Cor. 12:15

VII. A holy man will seek after purity of heart. He will dread all filthiness and uncleanness of spirit and will tend to avoid all things that might draw him into it. He knows his own heart is like tinder and will diligently keep clear of the sparks of temptation. No man should dare think himself strong or of having great personal resolve in this regard, when the Lord showed us how easily King David fell in the matter of Bathsheba and Uriah the Hittite. Few Christians are ever too watchful and too particular about this point.

VIII. A holy man will act and think in the fear of God. Not servile fear of punishment or discovery. It is the reverent fear of a good child, who wishes to live and move as if he was always before his father's face, because he loves him. Christ was this example in Himself:

And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD; - Isa. 11:1,2

IX. A holy man will work at humility. He will desire, in lowliness of mind (and not merely

the false modesty of the lips), to esteem all others better than himself. He will more easily see evil in his own heart than in any other in the world:

Abraham called himself dust and ashes (Gen. 18:27)

Jacob said that he was not worthy of the least of all the mercies (Gen. 32:10)

Job proclaimed himself as vile when reproved of the Lord (Job 40:1-4)

Paul called himself the chief of sinners (1Tim. 1:15)

After having done all, we are commanded to call ourselves unprofitable servants (Lk. 17:10)

X. A holy man will aspire to faithfulness in all the duties and relations in life. Not merely efforting as those who take no thought for their souls, because he has both higher motives and more help than they have.

And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ. – Col. 3:23,24

Then said these men, We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, except we find it against him concerning the law of his God. – Dan. 6:5

A person who aspires to practical holiness in the sight of God should aim at doing everything well, being ashamed of doing anything ill if they can help it. They should strive to be good husbands and good wives, good neighbors, good brothers and sisters, good subjects, good in private and good in public, good in the place of business and good at home –all driven by the Word of God, not the pleasing of other men’s hearts. Holiness is worth little indeed if it does not bear this kind of fruit. The Lord Jesus puts a searching question to His people, when He says, “What do ye more than others?” (Mt. 5:47).

XI. Finally, a holy man will strive to be spiritually minded in his affections. This is extremely important. He will endeavor to set his affections entirely on things above, and to hold things on earth with a very loose hand. He will not neglect the business of the life that now is; but will not allow his mindshare to be dominated by the things of this world, or the fleshly reasoning of men, even as he performs secular and vocational duties. He will aim to live like one whose treasure is in heaven and to pass through this world like a stranger and pilgrim traveling *toward* his home - *not already in it*. He will often commune with God in prayer, in the Bible, and in the assembly of His people – all these things will be the holy man’s *highest enjoyments* in this life. He will value every situation he finds himself in just in proportion as it draws him nearer to God. He will say with David:

My soul followeth hard after thee: thy right hand upholdeth me. – Ps. 63:8

Thou art my portion, O LORD: I have said that I would keep thy words. I intreated thy favour with my whole heart: be merciful unto me according to thy word. I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies. – Ps. 119:57-59

There is a lot here, and this list is incomplete – my sincere hope is that no little sheep with a tender conscience is discouraged or overly saddened of heart by these descriptions. I find them helpful, though I know I have failed miserably in nearly all of them. The practical holiness of a man never eliminates the presence of indwelling sin – not for one minute. It is a great mystery that often when a holy man would do good “*evil is present with (him).*” (Rom. 7:21) The old man is often clogging all his movements, trying to draw him back at every step he takes. But it is the excellence of a holy man that he is not at peace with indwelling sin, as others are. He hates it, mourns because of it, and longs to be free from its company. The work of sanctification within him is like the wall of Jerusalem - the building goes forward “*even in troublous times*” (Daniel 9:25).

What I’m *not* saying is that holiness comes to ripeness and perfection all at once. I’m also *not* saying that all the graces I have already touched upon must be found in full bloom and vigor before a man can be seen, in practice, as holy. I *am* saying something *far* from that. Sanctification is always a progressive work. Some men’s graces are found in the blade, some in the ear, and some are like full corn in the ear (Mk. 4:28). All must have a beginning. We must never despise “the day of small things” (Zech 4:10). And sanctification in the most faithful, sober and learned of men is an imperfect work, while we wear these robes of flesh. The gold will never be without some dross - the light will never shine without some clouds, until we reach the heavenly Jerusalem. The life of holy men is a continual warfare with sin, the world, and the devil; and sometimes we see them not overcoming but overcome. And our great hope and consolation is the imputed righteousness, and therefore holiness (in God’s operation upon our hearts), of Christ. We are given a spiritual capacity, that we may sow to the spirit – yet the flesh is always there, providing the conflict and contention:

For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body. – James 3:2

For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would. – Gal. 5:17

Even so, my hope is that the incomplete picture of practical holiness that I have painted is

the heart's desire and prayer of all true Christians. They press towards it, if they do not reach it. They may not attain to it, but they always aim at it. It is what they strive for and labor to be if it is not what they are. And with confidence of Scripture I say that true holiness is a great reality. It is something in a man that can be seen, and known, and marked, and felt by all around him. It is light: if it exists, it will show itself. It is salt: if it exists, its savor will be perceived. It is a precious ointment: if it exists, its presence cannot be hidden. Else we would not be provoked by the Holy Spirit of God unto it.

And with a spiritual understanding of our nature as fallen man, allowances exist for backsliding – there is occasional 'deadness' in many professing Christians. A road may lead from one point to another, and yet have winding and turning throughout. A man may be truly holy, and yet be drawn aside by many an infirmity. Gold is not the less gold because mingled with alloy. But after every allowance, a man cannot be called aspiring to holiness who willfully allows himself to live in sins as a matter of course, and is not humbled and ashamed because of them. I don't think the scripture supports seeing anyone as "holy" (on a practical level) who makes a habit of willfully neglecting known duties, and willfully doing what he knows God has commanded him not to do.

Practical holiness is important – but it cannot save us. It cannot put away sin. It cannot cover our iniquities. It cannot pay a debt. Practical holiness can do none of these things. The brightest saints are all "unprofitable servants". Our purest works are no better than filthy rags when tried by the light of God's holy law. With all our practical holiness we are no better than any other sinners. Even our best efforts are sometimes wrong in the motive, other times defective in the performance. By the deeds of the law shall no child of Adam ever be justified.

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast. – Eph. 2:8,9

Why then is holiness in conversation so important?

I. The voice of God in Scripture plainly commands it.

For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven... Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect. – Mt. 5:20, 48

But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy. – 1Pet. 1:15,16

II. It is one grand end and purpose for which Christ came into the world.

And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again. – 2Cor. 5:15

Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, - Eph. 5:25,26

Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. – Titus 2:14

In short, to talk of men being saved from the guilt of sin, without being also saved from its dominion in their hearts, is to contradict the witness of all Scripture. True Christians are:

Elect - “through sanctification of the Spirit.” (1Pet. 1:2)

Predestinated - “to be conformed to the image of [God’s] Son.” (Ro. 8:29)

Chosen – “that we should be holy” (Eph. 1:4)

Called – “with a holy calling.” (2Tim. 1:9)

Afflicted – “that we might be partakers of His holiness.” (Heb. 12:10)

Christ’s salvation is *complete*: He takes away the guilt of the believer’s sin, and He also breaks the power and clutch of that sin in our hearts and minds. The Lord gives unto His people the grace to strive against sin and to overcome.

III. Practical holiness is evidence of our faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. A faith which goes no further than the profession of the lips and has no influence on a man’s character is dead:

Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works. – James 2:17,18

True faith will always show itself by its fruits - it will sanctify, it will work by love, it will overcome the world, it will purify the heart. The only safe evidence that we are one with Christ, and Christ in us, is holy life. There was a thief on the cross, that none would despair; but there was only one, that none would presume. If we would die the death of the

righteous, let us not rest in slothful desires only; let us seek to live His life, and encourage one another to it.

IV. Holiness provides evidence that we love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity.

If ye love me, keep my commandments... He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him...If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. – Jn. 14:15,21,23

Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. – Jn. 15:14

And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him. He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked. – 1Jn. 2:3-6

It is difficult to find plainer words than these, and woe to those who neglect them! How dark of a state is a soul in who can contemplate all that Jesus suffered, and yet cling to those sins for which that suffering was undergone.

V. Holiness provides tokens that we are true children of God - which tokens we should seek.

They answered and said unto him, Abraham is our father. Jesus saith unto them, If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham...If God were your Father, ye would love me: for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me. – John 8:39, 42

Children in this world are generally like their parents. Some more and some less - but it is seldom indeed that you cannot trace a kind of family likeness. And it is much the same with the children of God. If men strive to no likeness to the Lord, it is vain to talk of them being His 'sons'. If we know nothing of holiness we may flatter ourselves all we please, but we have not the Holy Spirit dwelling in us. We must let men see by our good conversation that we are indeed the children of the Holy One, or else our son-ship is but an empty name.

VI. We must be holy, because this is the most likely way to do good to others. We cannot live for ourselves only in this world. Our lives are a silent sermon which all can read, for

better or for worse. It is likely that more is done for Christ's kingdom by the holy living of believers than we are aware of. There is a reality about a meek, humble, heartily lived walk with God which obliges men to take notice – to think and to feel. It carries a weight and influence with it which nothing else can give. It makes religion beautiful, and draws men to consider it, like a lighthouse seen afar off. They may not understand the justification by Christ through faith, but they can understand charity. On the flip side, there is likely more harm done by unholy and inconsistent 'Christians' than we are aware of. Such men are among Satan's best allies. They pull down by their lives what sincere ministers build with their lips and pens. They supply the children of this world with a never-ending excuse for remaining as they are. Christ's name is too often blasphemed because of the lives of 'Christians'. Let us take heed lest the blood of souls should be required at our hands.

VII. We must be holy because our present comfort depends much upon it. In some important ways (mostly in mindset and mindshare), there is a close connection between sin and sorrow, holiness and happiness, sanctification and consolation – even in affliction. Our calling and election are not according to our works, nor is our justification - but it is vain for anyone to suppose that he will have a lively sense of his justification, or an assurance of his calling, so long as he neglects good works, or does not strive to live a holy life. When the disciples forsook the Lord and fled, they escaped the danger associated with the fear of man, but they were miserable and sad (ensnared). When, shortly after, they confessed Him boldly before men, they were cast into prison and beaten; however:

...they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name. – Acts 5:41

He that follows Jesus most fully will always follow Him most comfortably. Our discomfort is mostly associated with our pride, discontent, fleshly reasoning and self-justification.

VIII. Lastly, practical holiness in this vapor of a life perfects and prepares the hearts of His saints for what lies ahead. Heaven is a holy place. The Lord of heaven is a Holy Being. The angels are holy creatures. Holiness is written on everything in heaven. Suppose for a moment that you were granted entrance into heaven without holiness. What would you do? What possible enjoyment could you feel there? To which of all the saints would you join yourself, and by whose side would you sit down? Their pleasures are not your pleasures, their tastes, not your tastes, their character not your character. How could you possibly be happy, if holiness is not a great comfort?

In this life – perhaps you love the company of the light and the careless, the worldly-minded and the covetous; you prefer the flatterer and pleasure-seeker, the good-time and

gregarious fellow. In this life, you may at times think the saints of God too strict, particular and serious – at times worthy of avoidance rather than delighting in their company. There will be no other company in heaven. In this life you might, at times, think praying, and Scripture-reading, and hymn singing, boring – or a thing to be tolerated now and then, but not preferred. But remember, heaven is a never-ending Sabbath. The inhabitants thereof “rest not day and night, saying, ‘Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty,’” in singing praise unto the Lamb. How could an unholy man find pleasure in an occupation such as this? Many people say, “I hope to go to heaven”. I don’t think they fully consider what they say. In this life, the scripture commands:

Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord: - Heb. 12:14

Is not this a text that ought to make us consider our ways, and search our hearts? Should it not raise within us solemn thoughts, and send us to closeted prayer? We must not merely have a Christian name, and Christian knowledge, we must have a Christian character also. We must be saints on earth if ever we mean to be saints in heaven. God has said it, and He will not go back: “Without holiness no man shall see the Lord.” Few if any of us feels the importance of holiness as much as we should. Do the scriptures not scream of a more pilgrim spirit, a more decided separation from the world, a conversation more evidently in heaven, a closer walk with God, than we muster? If we attain unto holiness, we must flee to Christ - this instant. This day. Wait for nothing or no one. Not a single stone is laid in the work of our sanctification until we go to Christ. He carries the spiritual work on in our hearts, by the Spirit put within us. Holiness comes from Christ. It is the result of a vital union with Him. Ask Christ to make you holy. Ask Christ to teach you to do His will.

We cannot abide in holiness without abiding in Christ. He is the Physician to whom we must daily go, if we would be well. He is the Manna which we must eat daily, and the Rock of which we must drink daily. It is upon His arm which we must lean daily. We must be *both* rooted *and* be built up in Him. Christ must be our ‘all in all,’ or else He is not. And if He is not, then where is the sanctification?

I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. – Gal. 2:20

I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me. – Php. 4:1

I love you all. Amen.