

Tonight we conclude a three-part subsection in our study of sanctification. Holiness is manifested in three basic interrelated areas of the Christian's life—body, mind, and relationships. The focused, empowered pursuit of holiness must take place in each of these three areas. Tonight we look at holiness of relationships.

The fact that we humans are relational beings is revealing itself profoundly in these days. The buzz term out there these days is "social distancing." Everyone is told to keep apart by 6 feet. But we are doing more than that. "Safer-at-home" necessitates a removal from each other's presence. And I am feeling it. Are you feeling it? Something is definitely missing in this effort to keep apart. It is because a central component to human nature as God has made us is relationality. And it is clear from scripture that the impact of sin upon relationships is to destroy them. Even so the impact of God's grace through Christ and the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit is to redeem relationships. So it is fitting in our study of sanctification and the pursuit of holiness that we spend a session on pursuing holiness in our relationships.

Let's begin with a theme verse. One verse in particular sets the tone for the pursuit of holiness in our relationships.

Romans 12:16 – Live in harmony with one another.

Think about harmony for a minute. Harmony is unlike unison. When people sing in unison or work in unison, they all sing the same note; they all do the same thing. But in harmony distinctions are recognized; in fact, they are the essence of a beautiful outcome. Relationships are magnified. Musical harmony involves the combinations of different notes to produce a full and rich audio experience. People are different and when those differences are expressed in holiness, beautiful harmony is the result. This theme verse is just the beginning. The Bible is a book about relationships.

1. It all starts with God himself.

The one true God is a God of relationship within himself. This is a key aspect of his Trinitarian nature. God is three persons. Those persons are not distinguished by a difference of essence; neither person is more or less God than the other two. However, the persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—are distinguished by differing but complimentary roles and dynamic personal relationships. The Son willingly denies himself for fulfilling the Father's purpose (Mark 14:32-36; Philippians 2:5-9). The Son honors the Father (John 8:49). The Son speaks what the father teaches him (John 8:28-29). There is unity and love between the 3 persons which models the unity and love which Jesus seeks

among his disciples (John 17:20-23). The Father exalts the Son. The Father sends the Spirit. The Son sends the Spirit. The Spirit magnifies Jesus. See how the different roles and the dynamic of affection, honor, and appreciation demonstrate relationship within the Being of God.

2. God Created and Designed Humanity to Be Relational.

There are many aspects to the fact that God made man in their image. I intentionally say "their image" because it reflects the language of Genesis 1:26: "Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." You have an expression of God's internal relationality in the words "let US make" and "in OUR image." Now by being made by God, human beings are in a relationship with God. And being made as a "them" human beings are in relation to one another as well. They are also in relation to all of creation. God said, "let them have dominion" over the creation he had made.

The first human-to-human relationship was between the man God made and the woman he made from him. God brings the man to recognize that he lacks a suitable helper. God himself says, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him." He did so and brought the woman to the man, and immediately the man recognized the connection. "This is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman, because she was taken out of man" (Genesis 2:18-23). Neither the man nor the woman is any more or less human or divine image-bearer, but each one differs from the another in such a way as to promote deep and intimate relationship. Immediately God makes a declaration which has relationality written all over it. "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). Off the bat, then, we observe that relationality is central to what it means to be human and that human relationships matter to God.

We were not made to go it alone. That is not good. We were made to be interwoven in a complex connectedness with others—God, other humans, and the rest of creation.

3. Sin Has Butchered Relationships

Shame. Blame. Hate. Pride. Selfishness. Envy. Murder. Disorder. Chaos. All of these followed the first act of human disobedience. In a single moment the ideal stage for flourishing in relationship to God, other humans, and the rest of creation came crashing down. The moment Adam and Eve sinned, they went off to cover-up. They were ashamed. When God called them to account, they shifted blame away from themselves, even blaming God himself for their wrong. Their relationship with God was broken as

they resisted him. Their relationship with each other would be marked by selfishness and competition. And they would face resistance from the creation itself. Relationships were out of harmony and thrown into enmity and hostility.

4. The Work of Jesus is to Reconcile and Restore

Colossians 1:19-23. *For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, 20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. 21 And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, 22 he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, 23 if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.*

Christ's work of reconciliation is a work to bring peace and reverse alienation and hostility. His work is to reconcile all things to himself. This reconciliation centers on reconciliation with God himself. Things that are reconciled to him begin to experience reconciliation to one another. His work of reconciliation will be full in glory. But now, those who are in Christ pursue holiness in conduct and relationships. Holiness cannot be separated from a pursuit of godliness in relationships.

5. The Bible Emphasizes Holiness in Relationships

The two over-arching commands of the whole of scripture are to love God with all you are and to love your neighbor as yourself. These are relational commands. The implications run throughout Scripture. And as we look in particular to the New Testament, we discover a pointed and extended emphasis on relationships.

Most of the New Testament epistles consist of a doctrinal, gospel emphasis followed by application. The application sections pinpoint characteristics of godliness which those in Christ are to pursue as they are being sanctified—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, and self-control. Moreover, the application sections also directly relate godliness to specific RELATIONAL roles in which Christ's followers find ourselves. So on the one hand we see that godliness is manifested in holiness of character, but at the same time godliness is manifested in holiness of relations as well.

1. The vertical relationship between God and each individual.

How are we to relate to God? Love (Mark 12:29-31) Obey (John 14:21) worship God (John 4:23-24; Hb 13:15) Know God (Philippians 3:10) Trust (1 Peter 5:7) Humble yourself before (1 Peter 5:6) Pray to (Ephesians 6:18)

2. The horizontal relationships between people themselves.

While we all have the same relational responsibilities in regard to God, our relational responsibilities on the horizontal level differ depending on the role that is ours in relation to one another. The Bible addresses a host of human relationships. Here is a list: husbands to wives (Ephesians 5:25-33), wives to husbands (Ephesians 5:22-24), parents to children (Ephesians 6:4), children to parents (Ephesians 6:1-3), masters to slaves (Ephesians 6:9), slaves to masters (Ephesians 6:5-8), Christian to Christian (Romans 12:9-16), Christian to non-Christian (1 Peter 2:12-17), church leaders to flock (1 Peter 5:1-4; Hebrews 13:7), flock to church leaders (1 Peter 5:5-6; Hebrews 13:7), elder to younger (1 Timothy 5:1) , younger to elder (1 Timothy 5:1), young man to young woman (1 Timothy 5:2), young woman to young man (1 Timothy 5:2), citizen to government (Romans 13:1-7), government to citizen (Romans 13:1-7), the weak in faith to the strong in faith (Romans 14:1-23), the strong in faith to the weak in faith (Romans 14:1-23).

Conclusion

Given this lengthy list, it is not feasible to go through it in depth point-by-point in this lesson. However, there are a few truths we should see and consider.

1. We must apply holiness in the context of our relationships. If we would be holy, it will be evident in our interactions with others. We cannot downplay how important relationships are to God, and we cannot separate growing in holiness from growing in God-directed behavior toward others in the unique relationship in which we stand with them.
2. Some aspects of relational holiness will differ in varying respects from person to person because of the differing roles involved. For example, a parent's role is distinguished from that of a child. Godliness for a parent means such things as providing sustenance, protection, discipline, and instruction to a child in a heart of love and with an approach that does not exasperate. Godliness for a child means love, honor, obedience, and respect.
3. Although relational holiness will vary in some ways, it will be consistent in others. Every relationship should include love, patience, godly communication, humility, gratitude, kindness, gentleness, understanding, etc.
4. Failure on the part of a person in relationship to me does not excuse failure on my part. Especially when we are relating to those who are in closer relationships to us, our flesh asserts that if they are not relating to us rightly, then we do not need to behave toward them rightly either. This is a lie. God instructs us to do what is godly regardless of how another is treating us. It does not matter if that person is our parent, our spouse, or our brother or sister in Christ. There are no "ifs" in God's commands to relate biblically.