

Read also Proverbs 3:21-32. Check out the service at [www.fpcd.org](http://www.fpcd.org).

We have been talking about Community in Unity. The way this began was from desperation. I was appalled at the state of civility in our nation. I find myself wanting to flee. One day Sean Russell and I were talking about old television shows like Andy Griffith and Gomer Pyle, Get Smart, and Mr. Ed (which he didn't appreciate, but I loved). That conversation made me want to escape in a DeLorean to go back in time. From that came this series on what it takes to have unity.

We have covered five components necessary for a community to have unity:

1. Worship and prayer. Hezekiah, called the people back to worship and when threatened by an enemy nation, he prayed. And God heard.
2. Control the tongue. George Washington wrote about civility. Jesus redeemed hostile situations with his slow-to-speak gracious but truthful tongue.
3. Be humble. The disciples argued about who was the greatest, but Jesus said if you want to be great, serve others.
4. Passionate, not passive, Faith. Passionate, active faith of the whole body has made the church last still today, as we work together to spread the gospel.
5. Blessing not cursing. King Balak was a curser. But Balaam learned God's people are blessed, and we are to then extend that blessing to others.

All of these things bring unity to a community and to the church. Today we end our series by talking about the power of a holy life.

Proverbs reads: When you commit yourself to God's ways, "You need not be afraid of sudden disaster or the destruction that comes upon the wicked, for the LORD is your security. He will keep your foot from being caught in a trap" (Pro 3:25-26). He says "give when it is in your power to help someone; don't pick a fight; don't stoop to violence; don't plot harm; don't follow evil people. **Be godly.**"

Wise advice. Holy living.

Holiness is not held in high esteem in the culture of 2016. You hear very little about the value of it. It's hard for Christians even to feel confident they can live holy lives. Few strive to do it, but for those who do, the reward is great.

Holiness is an old word from the Old Testament as well as the New Testament. Holiness is *that which is consistent with God and his character*. Proverbs says, "Don't lose sight of it. Commit yourself to this lifestyle." Apostle Paul says, "Dedicate, devote, set apart" yourself to be holy.

Let's hear our passage and then we will talk about it. READ Colossians 3:12-17

Think of your ideal friend. Would these characteristics describe a great friend?

Someone who:

- doesn't pick a fight for no reason
- doesn't plot harm

- isn't violent

Rather, you would want someone who:

- gives immediately when they see the need
- does whatever it takes to help
- makes allowances for your faults
- forgives
- has mercy
- is kind, humble, and gentle
- is patient with you
- advises you with wisdom
- is thankful to God

That is a biblical definition of a holy life.

Martin Luther wrote, "As our heavenly Father has in Christ freely come to our aid, we also ought freely to help our neighbor through our body and its works, and each one should become . . . a Christ to the other that we may be Christs to one another." He adds, "Surely we are named after Christ, not because he is absent from us, but because he dwells in us." (*The Freedom of the Christian*, 1520)

The holy life is to be little Christs. The holy life is to reflect the character of God. It takes some practice. But it is not impossible. It takes some discipline. But we do not do it alone. It takes some intention to live into holiness because in today's culture we need to "feel good." Emotions often control us.

For example, and this is a very simple example, the Rangers player Rowned Odor is an excellent player. He hit a walk-off home run on Tuesday night. But that was after he hit a single and ran for a double and easily got thrown out. His emotions get the best of him. His lack of restraint cost him more than once. He has been suspended for starting two brawls in his career. And he often swings at obvious bad pitches right when he steps up to the plate.

It's hard for Rowned to be patient. But the discipline of patience allows the power of his talent to be realized. When he waits, he does extremely well.

Holiness in one sense is living out godly characteristics such as patience, humility, thinking of others first, not picking a fight for no reason. It impacts your job. A holy life is a blessing to those around you.

Holiness counterbalances idolatry, which is living for what we see and feel. For instance, holiness helps us squelch the desire to be the hero, or wanting to be known for something great, or to live for possessions.

Holiness also counterbalances unbelief. It helps you to have faith in the victory of God during hardship and suffering.

You may not have thought of holiness in those simple and realistic ways. Holiness is choosing the lifestyle that Jesus chose for himself.

For example, Jesus was practicing holiness in the desert. It was a harsh place; hard on the body, which is weak. The body wants to give in to its appetites and desires. Jesus disciplined his body by fasting, solitude, prayer, and frugality. He lived simply. We know from early in his life Jesus studied the Scriptures. Therefore, the desert for Jesus was a place of power. Because of his practice of holiness he could powerfully answer the devil.

Paul practiced the same holiness. He prayed, he studied, he gave—his holiness made him strong in tough times. He writes:

We think you ought to know . . . about the trouble we went through in the province of Asia. We were crushed and overwhelmed beyond our ability to endure, and we thought we would never live through it. In fact, we expected to die. But as a result, we stopped relying on ourselves and learned to rely only on God, who raises the dead. And he did rescue us from mortal danger, and he will rescue us again. (2 Corinthians 1:8-10a)

Paul could handle pressure due to his holiness.

Of course Paul was extraordinary—but what about your average person today?

Ten years ago a man from a town next to the Amish community entered West Nickel Mines School and shot ten girls, five of whom died. You have probably heard of the tragedy. That man, Charlie Roberts, had a wife and three children, ages seven, five, and eighteen months. By the end of the day, she was widowed and this family was turned upside down, never to be the same again.

The police told her and her parents; later that afternoon the children were told; and then for safety's sake and protection from the media, they all went down the road to her parent's house. That evening, as she sat at her parents' kitchen table, Marie Roberts saw a group of five or six Amish men walking down the road and they turned into the driveway. Her stomach turned. She could hardly breathe. She could not face them. So her father went out to meet them.

And then the most unimaginable thing happened. One of the Amish men stepped toward her father and opened his arms wide. Her father fell into those arms, and he was comforted by another grieving man. Conversation, hands clasping, nods. They stood there for a long time grieving and comforting one another.

When her father came in he said to Marie, "They came because they were concerned about you and the children. They want to know what they can do, how they can help. They want you to know they forgive Charlie and that forgiveness embraces us all."

Every one of those men had a family member in the school that morning. There are no words to describe the grace, the holiness of that moment when men whose families had been ravaged; whose daughters lay dead and injured, were concerned about her and her children.<sup>1</sup>

When holiness becomes your desired goal, it has far-reaching effects. It can affect your family more than anything else. It doesn't just fix things; it redeems.

This community was held together by holiness in its people.

The Amish could have chosen hate or blame. But because they had made a lifestyle of being little Christs, because they devoted themselves to praying, studying the Word, fasting, being frugal, giving their all to Jesus, they had grown in holiness. They had grown in humility, mercy, kindness, gentleness, and love. They had become people who did not wait to give and turn to help others in need. They did not return violence for violence.

They forgave.

Later one of the mothers said this: "Forgiveness doesn't mean you have forgotten, but you have given up to God the one who has hurt you and you have given up your right to seek revenge. I placed the situation in God's hands and accepted this is the way it was. And I choose not to hold it against Charles because it really does not help me or anything anyway."

The power of a holy life can help you in as simple a way as making you a good employee, whether you are a professional ball player or sitting in an office. It can strengthen you for life's normal trials and tribulations which we all experience. And a holy lifestyle can be the hope that overcomes the most devastating darkness. The power of a holy life reaches farther than any of us can imagine.

AMEN

---

<sup>1</sup> Marie Roberts Monville and Cindy Lambert, *One Light Still Shines: My Life Beyond the Shadow of the Amish SchoolHouse Shooting*, 2013 (EPUB).