

Family Service

WELCOME:

SENTENCES AND CALL:

PRAISE: 237 Holy, holy, holy

PRAYER (Adoration, confession, thanks and invocation):

PRAISE: 99 Come on and celebrate

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

READINGS: 1 Thessalonians 4: 3-7 (page 1187) and 1 Peter 1: 14-16 (page 1217)

ALL-AGE TALK: 'The Pursuit of holiness'

PRAISE and OFFERING: 445 Lord the light of your love is shining

PRAYER (Offering and Intercession):

PRAISE: 442 Lord of the church we pray for our renewing

BENEDICTION: The Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit; be with us all evermore.

What is holiness and why is it so important?

Intro:

Quality control- If you've a product to sell and you want to make a profit it's essential that you've a dedicated team inspecting each item before it hits the shelves.

I wonder how good we are at quality control in Arklow Presbyterian Church. Could we tell the difference between a cheap imitation and the real McCoy? Well let's find out.

Invite 6 people to come up to the front and taste (eyes closed) two different types of Jaffa Cakes (one good , one cheap).

Invite 6 young people to come up to the front and taste (eyes closed) two different types of Cola (one good, one cheap).

God practices Quality Control. If we call ourselves 'Christian' then we bear our maker's name, 'Christ'. As we go out from Church into the public domain our lives are on display. They will either represent God as being someone Special, someone good, someone worth investing in or they will make people say, "Nah, that's a load of rubbish!"

You see God wants us to live lives that are different, lives that have an heir of quality about them, lives that will bring honour to God. The word the bible uses to describe this quality is called, "Holiness." As Christians, God wants us to be holy. But what exactly does it mean to be holy?

For some it is simply a list of 'Thou shalt nots' which often include smoking, drinking and going to the cinema. For others it is a list of dos, for example, you must wear a suit to church, you must sing from a particular hymn book or you must use a certain version of the bible.

The particular lists of dos and don'ts varies depending on the Christian group concerned. Unfortunately all these ideas miss the true point of what holiness is; for that we need to go back and see how the writers of the New Testament used the term.

In our bible readings saw that Paul used the term to describe the opposite of a life of immorality and impurity. We then heard that Peter used the term to describe a life that is the opposite to a life of evil desires.

As far as the New Testament is concerned then, to be Holy is to live a life in obedience to the moral principles of the bible and not to live according to the principles of the world. To be holy is to be separated from sin and dedicated to obeying God.

But why is it so important that we make a conscious effort to live holy lives?

1 Holiness gives us assurance.

You've heard it said, 'all that glitters is not gold.' Unfortunately our daughter Erin discovered the pain of this truth while on holiday last week. She was so delighted when she discovered a sparkling gold necklace in a book that her auntie had bought her. She showed it off proudly everywhere she went and even insisted on wearing it in bed. But to her great disappointment, she suddenly developed a rash around her neck below the necklace- It wasn't real gold after all despite it's shiny appearance and she was forced to stop wearing her prized possession!

In a similar way, holiness is important in our Christian lives because it is this holiness that gives us the assurance that our faith is genuine and not false. Now it is true that it is not our holiness that makes us a Christian. The bible tells us that even our righteousness is like filthy rags in God's sight. The bible also makes it clear that it is only the righteousness of Jesus' sinless life and only His perfect sacrifice for sin on the cross that can make us acceptable to God when we turn from sin and trust in Christ.

Nevertheless, the bible also teaches us that when someone truly repents and trusts in Christ that the Holy Spirit comes to live in them. The Holy Spirit then creates in us a desire to pray, to read the bible and to obey God. If the Holy Spirit lives in someone, then that person will, day by day, month by month, year by year be growing in holiness. So Paul writes in **Romans 8 v 5**... *"Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires."*

But if someone is not growing in holiness and has little or no desire to love and obey God, then the Holy Spirit does not live in them, no matter whether they claim to be Christian or not. So again Paul can write in **Romans 8 v9**... *"If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ he does not belong to Christ."* Thus, holiness is important in our lives because it is only as we see ourselves growing in and hungering for holiness that we can have assurance that we are real and not counterfeit Christians.

Let me ask you a question, if you were standing in the dock today accused of being a Christian, would there be sufficient evidence of holiness in your life to convict you?

2 Holiness keeps us in fellowship with God.

The second reason holiness is so important, is because it is necessary for us to be in fellowship with God. Many times we read in the bible of God withdrawing his presence from his people because of their sin. In Revelation the seven churches are warned that if they do not repent God will remove his presence and in one church Jesus is actually outside the door knocking to be invited in. You know how it is when you or I have said or done something to a friend or relative or spouse and a cold, icy silence has arisen like a glass wall between you and the other person. You can see each other but the invisible wall prevents you from communicating with each other. So it is with sin- it keeps us from being in intimate touch with God. And yet the wonderful thing is that God loves us and longs for us simply to say sorry in order for that barrier of sin to be removed and our fellowship with him to be restored. The

bible promises... *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."*

If you and I want to be in continual close communion with God, then we need to keep short accounts with him. We need to take time each day to evaluate our lives and to be honest with God about our sins. God doesn't require us to be perfect to remain in fellowship with him, but he does expect us to evaluate our lives regularly and to both grieve over and turn away from what we know to be wrong.

3 Holiness keeps us clean for service.

The third reason holiness is so important is because it is necessary for serving God effectively. Again our recent holiday experiences illustrate this point. Often people would drop by the caravan. At such times there would be an initial panic and a frantic look in the cupboard to see if there were any clean cups. This meant trudging over to the scullery 3 times a day to do the washing up- not a task I relished, but one that I knew was important because dirty dishes are no use for serving either yourself or more importantly other people. In a similar way, we are God's plates and cups for service. We are Jesus' hands and feet on earth. His name and his reputation are at stake in the lives that we live. While it is true that God can use anyone for anything, the bible often reminds us that God particularly chooses to use clean vessels in order to serve him and other people in the world. So Paul could write to the young minister Timothy in **2 Tim 2 v21** and say... *"If a man cleanses himself from unholy purposes he will be an instrument for holy purposes, useful to the master and prepared to do any good work."* For us to be clean vessels we also need a daily cleansing by admitting our sins to God and each other and by being determined to turn away from these sins and to walk in obedience. Only then can we be of effective use in God's service without the embarrassment of bringing dishonour to his holy name.

Let me ask you, are you keeping clean so that God can use you to serve him and other people effectively?

4 Holiness is needed for our own well-being.

The final reason holiness is so important is because it is needed for our own well-being. We represent God in the world. If we live unholy lives or hypocritical lives then people will get the wrong idea about God. God doesn't want his name to be dragged through the mud in this way. Therefore, if we continue to live in disobedience, God may have to discipline us in order to get our attention and motivate us to change. So we read in **Hebrews 12 v 6...** *"The Lord disciplines those he loves and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son."*

Now it is one of the realities of the Christian life that there will be times when we don't sense God's presence, when we don't feel joyful, when we are sick and when circumstances are against us. All these things can and do happen to us even when we are seeking with all our hearts to live to please God. Yet sometimes God can also use these things to alert us to areas of continual disobedience in our lives. Therefore we need to be constantly open to the possibility of God's hand of discipline and be willing to confess and repent. As the Psalmist said, *"Search me and know my heart, test me and know my anxious thoughts, see if there be any offensive way in me and lead me in your way everlasting."*

Do you ask God to give you wisdom about your difficulties, to discern whether they are his hand of correction or simply the means to mould you and increase your dependence on him?

Conclusion:

Without holiness none of us will see the Lord.

Holiness is not simply a list of dos and don'ts.

To be holy is to be committed to a life of obedience to the principles we discover in God's Word.

Holiness is so important in our lives because:

- It gives us the assurance that we really are Christians
- It keeps us close to God
- It keeps us clean for service and
- It prevents us from needing God's discipline.

Call: Isaiah 6: 1-3 (page 690)

Adoration, confession, thanks and invocation:

Almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit we come before you this morning in reverence and awe. We praise you for you alone are holy. Your character is perfect, your commands are perfect, your judgements are perfect. Lord as we think on your righteousness, it reminds us of our own unrighteousness. Lord we have sinned against you in what we have said, in what we have done, in the thoughts we have entertained, in the things we haven't done that we should have. We are truly sorry. Show us where we need to change and give us the strength to obey. We thank you that you are also gracious and merciful. We thank you that when we honestly admit our wrongdoing that you forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Thank you that Jesus has paid the price for all our sins. Thank you that He is risen and exalted. Thank you that He prays for us daily in heaven. Thank you that His Spirit lives within us. Thank you for the freedom to worship you with other Christians here this morning. So come and be present among us by your Spirit. And may the words of our lips and the meditations of our hearts bring you great joy, O Lord our rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Offering and Intercession:

Lord we thank you that you are perfect in your goodness to us. As we bring you our offerings so help us to offer you also our lives as living sacrifices holy and acceptable in your sight. So may all that we say and do bring honour to your name.

We pray for others:

Our Father, which art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name,
Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, On earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day, our daily bread, And forgive us our trespasses,
As we forgive those who trespass against us,
And lead us not into temptation, But deliver us from evil,
For Thine is the Kingdom, the power and the glory,
For ever and ever, AMEN.