

**Order of Service Arklow Presbyterian 10.00 a.m. (18<sup>th</sup> Jan 2009)**

**WELCOME:**

**CALL to WORSHIP:**

**PRAYER** (Adoration and Invitation):

**PRAISE:** 327 Immortal, invisible God only wise

**PRAYER** (Confession and thanks):

**ANNOUNCEMENTS:**

**CHILDREN'S TALK: DVD of Sunday School Project (May need Marcus' help)**

**PRAISE:** 242 Hosanna, Hosanna, Hosanna in the highest

*(Announce that children leave for Sunday School after this hymn)*

**PRAYER** (Intercession):

**OT READING:** Psalm 32 (page 560)

**NT READING:** Romans 6: 1-14 (page 1133)

**PRAISE:** Before the throne of God above (**Words on page below**)

**SERMON:** 'Why do we not experience more progress in holiness?'

**OFFERING AND DEDICATION:**

**PRAISE:** In Christ alone, my hope is found (**Words on page below**)

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

## Why do we not experience more progress in holiness?

### **Intro:**

Read from 'Pursuit of holiness' p17 and 18 down to *phone call*.

I'm sure that like me you've also felt as frustrated as the writer Jerry Bridges. I know that holiness is my responsibility and I want to live a life pleasing to God. I also know that it is my birthright as a Christian because the Holy Spirit lives in me. So why is it then that I lose my temper with my children? Why is it then that I say something unkind to my wife? Why is it that I sometimes eat too much or moan and complain about my lot in life?

Why do I sometimes feel defeated in my struggle with sin. Is Paul's message in Romans 6 v14 that sin shall not be my master some kind of pipe dream?

The first thing that must be said is that this struggle with sin is a normal part of the Christian life. It is often this struggle that keeps us humble and helps us to rely more on God than ourselves. However, it must also be said that sometimes we don't make the progress that we want or should be making in our pursuit of holiness. This morning I want us to look at three possible reasons for failing to make the progress that we should in our Christian lives.

### **1 Our attitude is more self-centred than God-centred.**

The first progress preventor is that often our attitude is more self-centred than God-centred. We live in a success orientated society so that our happiness and acceptance is often tied up to how much money we can make or how nice a house or car we can afford. This success orientated mind-set can spill over into our Christian lives so that we become more concerned about our victory over sin and over the satisfaction or joy that brings rather than being concerned about the fact that sin grieves and hurts God. God wants us to walk in obedience, not victory. Obedience is God-focused; victory is self-focused. While this may seem like splitting hairs, until we start to be less self-centred in wanting to be victorious and until we start to be more God-centred in simply wanting to obey no matter what we get out of it, we will not consistently live holy lives.

### **2 We have misunderstood what it means to live by faith.**

The second progress problem that we have, is that we have misunderstood what it means to live by faith. Many of us have either been wrongly taught or have simply misunderstood phrases in the bible like Galatians 2 v 20 which says... "I have been crucified with Christ, therefore it is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me. Therefore the life that I now live, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me." At times we have taken verses like this to mean that the reason we are experiencing so little progress in our pursuit of holiness is because we are trying to do it on our own strength. Rather we are told that we need to 'let go and let God,' to allow Christ through the Holy Spirit to live his life through us and so produce the characteristics of his holiness in our lives.

Unfortunately this attitude is taking scripture out of context and doesn't try to understand this verse in light of the rest of scripture. On balance, the scriptures teach that progress in holiness is a two-sided coin. It is a partnership between us and God. We cannot be holy without God's help; that is why we need to turn from sin and trust in Christ so that we may receive the Holy Spirit to live in us and give us the power to obey God. That is why we constantly need to pray and ask the Holy Spirit to help us. But the other side of the coin is equally stressed in the bible. It is our responsibility not to let go and let God, but to put off and put on and to make every effort to be found blameless in God's sight.

The bottom line is that God holds each of us personally responsible for walking in obedience or disobedience. The late bishop of Liverpool J.C. Ryle sums it up well when he says... "That faith in Christ is the root of all holiness, no well-instructed Christian will ever think of denying. But surely the scriptures teach us that in following holiness the true Christian needs personal exertion and work as well as faith."

Let me illustrate it. Farming is a joint venture between God and the farmer. The farmer plows, sows, fertilises and cultivates, all the while knowing that ultimately he or she is dependent on God sending the rain and the sun to cause the crop to grow. The farmer can't do what God must do, but neither will God do what the farmer should do. In the same way, holiness is a joint venture between us and God. We cannot be holy without God's help, but equally we cannot be holy without effort on our part.

Often we love to talk about God's provision for us- how Christ defeated death and sin on the cross and how the Holy Spirit lives within us to give us the power to obey. But rarely do we emphasise our own responsibility. Often that is because we simply don't want to face our own responsibility. We pray for victory when we know that we should be acting in obedience. Or maybe its because we've become confused about what we are to do ourselves and what we are to rely o God for. The truth is that the two go hand in hand. We can only obey because the Holy Spirit lives in us but it is still our responsibility to do the obeying. As one pastor put it... "You can put away that habit that has mastered you if you truly desire to do so!"

It is only when you and I acknowledge that it is our responsibility to obey, that we will make any progress in holiness- God will not do the obeying for

### **3 We don't take sin seriously.**

The third reason we fail to experience progress in holiness is because we have categorised sins into those which are acceptable to God and those which are not. So we'll point the finger at someone who smokes a cigarette or pushes drugs, but we remain unconcerned about the poverty in the world, or how much we over-eat or how little we exercise. We'll shake our heads and tut when we read of someone who has defrauded their company or the inland revenue of thousands of pounds but we'll have no qualms about breaking copyright laws for computer software or about breaking the speed limit if we need to get somewhere in a hurry. Yet the bible says in the Song of Solomon that... "it is the little foxes that spoil the vines." It is often compromise on

these little issues that lead to greater downfalls. And who is to say that a little ignoring of civil law is not a serious offence in the eyes of God?

It comes down to this- are you and I willing to call sin, 'sin' not because it is big or little, but because God's word forbids it?

If you and I are to make progress in holiness, then we must not categorise sin. We must call sin, 'sin' and keep short accounts with God about our own failings rather than pointing the finger at others in order to feel smug about ourselves.

### **Conclusion:**

Until we reach heaven, we will not be perfect. God is merciful and understands our weakness, yet he expects us to strive to be holy even as he is holy even though we can never hope to attain such a goal. If you and I want to make progress in our pursuit of holiness we must:

- Become more God-centred in our attitude to sin. We must be focused on obedience not victory.

If you and I want to make progress in our pursuit of holiness we must:

- Realise that it is our responsibility to obey

If you and I want to make progress in our pursuit of holiness we must:

- Call sin, 'sin' and not allow ourselves to indulge in little sins while condemning bigger sins in others.

**Call:**

*“Be Holy in all you do just as God who has called you is Holy.”*

**Adoration and Invitation:**

Lord God, you are Holy, surpassing human expression. You are perfect in love, in kindness and goodness, in wisdom and justice. There is no one like you in all the earth. And yet, your own standard is the one you set before us and say *“As I am holy, so you be holy.”* Lord without your help we cannot even begin on the journey towards this goal. But we thank you that in Christ you have freed us from the Kingdom of darkness and placed us into your Kingdom of light. We thank you that by trusting in Jesus we have received the gift of your Spirit. So as we come to worship you this morning we ask again that you will help us by your spirit to give you our fullest concentration. Help us to understand your word and to pray and praise you with sincerity. Lord we hope that our worship will bring you great joy. Grant that through our worship you will renew us in mind and in spirit and give us a greater desire to be the people that you have made us in Christ and the people that you want us to be. For its in His name that we pray. Amen.

**Confession and Thanks:**

Heavenly Father, we confess that at times we have not taken seriously your call for us to live lives that are holy. We admit that at times we make excuse for our sins and we label them simply as our foibles rather than as thoughts and words and actions that are against you. Forgive us when we forget that our sin grieves your heart and even makes you angry. Forgive us when we are quick to point out the sins of others but proudly ignore the offences within our own lives.

Yet Lord we thank you that you are rich in mercy. We bless you that when we honestly own up to our wrong and are willing to change that you forgive us completely. We thank you that because Jesus has died and has risen that by trusting in Him we have a new status and a new power to overcome sin in our lives. We thank you that sin is no longer our Master. We thank you that we have received your Spirit. We thank you that we can now live lives that do please you and bring us great joy and satisfaction.

So help us increasingly to understand who we are in Christ. Help us to continually pursue holiness as a way of life and so live up to all that you have made us in Jesus. And to you Father, Son and Holy Spirit be all the glory now and in eternity. Amen.

**Intercession:**

Gracious Father we pray for peace in our world. For all national leaders that they may have wisdom to know and courage to do what is right. For all men and women that their hearts may be turned to you in the search for righteousness and truth. For those who are working to improve international relationships that they may find the true way of reconciliation. For those who suffer as a result of war- the injured and disabled, the mentally distressed, the homeless and the hungry, those who mourn for their dead and especially for those who are without hope or without friend to sustain them in their grief.

We pray for the churches and ministers in our town. Give each one strength, courage and wisdom to know how to lead your people in ways of holiness and truth, in peace and in unity. God our Father, Creator of the world please help us to really love one another. Make nations friendly with other nations, make all of us love one another like brothers and sisters. Help us to do our part to bring peace in our homes, in our workplaces, in our church family and in our local community. So may we truly be called the Sons of God. These prayers we offer in Jesus' name who teaches us to pray together saying:

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.

**Offering:**

God your perfection is expressed in your provision for your people. We confess that it is often only human greed that causes many to live in want. We thank you again for your goodness to us. As we present our gifts as an expression of our thanks we also present ourselves. We dedicate ourselves to seeing sin for what it really is. We gladly accept the personal responsibility you give each of us to obey you. And we commit ourselves to live in a way that will bring you honour in every detail. Help us by your Spirit to make this prayer a reality. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.