

Sermon 46: Romans 6:13b: Presenting ourselves to God

OUTLINE

Not by a negative holiness

Not by playing dead

Not a once off action

INTRODUCTION

What is holiness? J. C. Ryle in his classic book called *Holiness*, defined holiness in twelve points.

1. Holiness is to have the same mind as God, to love what He loves and hate what He hates.
2. It is when we shun every known sin and obey every known command
3. Holiness is a life that seeks to be Christlike in everything that we do. His perfect human life being the model for ours.
4. Holiness includes following hard after meekness, that is gentleness and patience in the face of suffering.
5. Following hard after self-denial, keeping a check and reign on all of our desires.
6. Following after love, seeking that love to God and man is our highest motive in all of our doings.
7. Following mercy and benevolence, in other words being filled with compassion and feeling for the afflicted and seeking to meet their physical need.
8. Following purity of heart, this is the pursuit of having our hearts empty of all idols and united in a single passion and purpose in serving God.
9. Living in a fear of the Lord, this is not a craven fear but a sense of respect and awe, honouring God according to the magnitude of His being.
10. Following after humility, this is to think of others more highly than yourself, and honestly about your sinfulness and giftedness.
11. Following after faithfulness in all our relationships, being people of truth and integrity in all dealings with others, fulfilling all our social obligations.
12. Finally, following after spiritualmindedness. To have one's mind set on our hope, filled with the right things and informing all that we do.

We are presently dealing with Paul's definition of holiness which is a more general double sided one. We have the negatives where one is called on not to offer up the various parts of our lives to sin; and then we have the corresponding positive side where we are called to offer all of ourselves to God in service. We have considered in part the way in which we should not hand ourselves over to sin, we have only brushed the surface of how we are not to offer the different parts of ourselves to sin by examining the mindgate, the eyegate and the eargate. Today we continue looking at the positive side of Paul's definition in the second half of verse 13, 'Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.' As we continue

looking at the positive side Paul gives us three points to consider, firstly, that holiness is not only about 'do not's' but the 'dos'; that we have to stop playing dead and act alive; and thirdly, that presenting ourselves to God is not a once off action but a life of repentance.

Not by a negative holiness

Holiness often has a bad reputation because of the legalistic emphasis on the 'do not's' of God's law without the balancing 'dos' of God's law. Paul's own background would have been one of a Pharisee that stressed avoiding certain things, at certain times with certain people. He would have had the more than 600 rules of 1st Century Judaism memorised, and in an attempt to manufacture his own self-righteousness to earn God's continuing and saving grace would have lived a strict life of not doing certain things. Christ characterised the religious holiness of 1st Century Pharisaism as 'straining out a gnat but swallowing a camel.' In other words they excelled in doing the little negative things like giving a tithe on the garden herbs that they grew, but they neglected the weightier issues like looking after the poor. The trouble is that this is the tendency of all of our fallen hearts. When we think of service to God we automatically think of it in terms of keeping a set of laws instead of a heart of love, and this is why we see people all over the world trying to earn their way into heaven by their own good works. The law of God, although a good and perfect thing, when in the hands of those who are not Christians or Christians who are acting according to the flesh, it can become a weapon of mass destruction. At the heart of the sinner's use of the law is selfishness. So the law becomes a way of keeping certain undesirables out of your select group; a way of institutionalizing your man-made traditions and weathering the change from generation to generation; a negative cast to the law has also been a way of people who are conceited and think they are actually less sinful than other people to condemn others and commend themselves; and in the church, even amongst Christians we find that there are those who see service to God primarily as a set of 'do not's.' The influences behind this thought would have been partly one of the 'Holiness movement' of the 1800s that had a Wesleyan theology and believed that a second spiritual blessing of entire consecration was paid for by extreme abstinence. So a works mentality was introduced where you earn the gift of a divine love driving the soul in a perpetually easy life of holiness by giving up everything. Another influence would have been the Roman Catholic heritage that it stole from Greek thought where everything that is bodily is seen as sinful, so basic pleasures that God gave us to enjoy like, flavours and music and art were seen as sub-spiritual or worldly. In the 1900s we saw a form of Christianity that was obsessed with not doing many different things. Going to movies, dancing, wearing make-up, drinking alcohol, and many other things. As a result there is a public image to Christian holiness that is very militant, unhappy and obsessed with not doing certain things. And let me say that this is one of the easiest sins for a Christian to fall into. We love to see the sin in others, we love to pry into other's lives and voice what we think they should be doing, we love not thinking about our own sins but applying all of our investigative powers, our casuistry, our problem solving, our insights into God's law in other people's lives not our own. A judgemental, negative, vocal call to stop doing stuff is a lazy, unself-conscious, blind, distracted, and sub-Christian perspective is natural to our sinfulness.

Now it is true that holiness does include not doing certain things, but if this is the main thrust, the lasting impression; then we have misrepresented what holiness actually is. Please don't think that I am saying that this generation of Christians is leaving a better impression with the opposite reaction of assimilating the world. Holiness is not Christians trying there hardest to not do certain things 24 hours a day. Sometimes it may feel this way, and so we become preoccupied with not doing. We are not those who define ourselves by what we don't do. If we did we would be living a defensive line and not an offensive one. We would be defined by what we weren't doing and too busy to be going about what we should be doing. The devil is quite happy with us as long as we are very busy dedicating all our efforts in maintaining our not doing and ignoring the Great commission.

We need to appreciate that Paul advances the definition of holiness beyond the 'do not's' to the 'dos'. He calls on us to actively present ourselves to God. It is true that Christians are deliberately not doing many things, but really, not doing is simply a by-product of business in doing the will of God. In today's message my single goal is to portray holiness positively and not negatively to show that it is primarily active not passive, and positive not negative.

Without going into as much detail as Ryle does let me try and summarise this positive view of holiness under three subheadings:

Firstly, true holiness is when we do everything from a heart of love that is seeking to worship and glorify God. When an outsider looks at the religious activity of a monk, or a nun they might conclude that with all the ritual and rules that it is a very holy life. However, actions in and of themselves are not neutral, they depend for their moral value on whether they are being done for the glory of God or the service of self. So for example, if I give to the poor, or seek to serve my neighbour, but my driving motive is so that I can buy my way into heaven. This motive is full of the pride of self-ability and is denying the provision that God has made in His Son and the command to trust in His works not our own. If I serve my neighbour out of a sense of guilt trying to make atonement for something bad that I have done recently, once again our attempts to bribe God with our guilt induced half-hearted tainted efforts are an affront to His holiness and are the opposite of pleasing to Him. Or if I am pursuing a life of service because I just believe that I am better than those who do drugs, and I have an image to portray and maintain. Once again, I am doing things out of selfish motives not out of love for God. In order to guarantee that we stop using our good deeds as offerings to God for our salvation we need to take Jesus Christ as our only hope for being made acceptable before a holy God. Once we find Him to be our saviour, with His righteousness justifying us, His life within us enabling holiness, His glorious resurrection our guaranteed future; when we see how unworthy we are of this gracious gift, and we turn to God in thanks, love, adoration and gladly give whatever life we have to making this love known by word and deed. This is true holiness. This is a life of service that is done for the right reasons, for God because of what He has done for us. Only those who have tasted this Gospel and have all their acceptance taken care of in Christ can serve as children and not as slaves, out of love and not out of some self-oriented salvation plan.

If you are dragging yourself to your service, if you are at the place where you are bitter because you have to give again, if you have grown weary in doing good and feel that your service is meaningless and without effect. If just generally speaking you are feeling sluggish and apathetic and have no motivation in your holiness. This is the time for you to consider Christ and what He has done for you once again. To remind yourself that He was a human being burdened by the same loads that you bear. That He has suffered greater pains, and sacrifices, and rejections, and every other thing that we find discouragement in, and yet He has pursued us in sacrificial love. Someone so perfect, going so far, for me so undeserving. We need to stop measuring our own pain and measure His, our own discomforts and measure His, and only then will our hearts break in broken hearted repenting praise and rise up again refreshed for more willing service. A pursuit of holiness from a heart whose first love has been reignited is the true root of holiness. The purest motive in holiness is not merely the desire to be sin free, but loveful and sin free. And when we are full of love we will seek even more to be free from sin.

Secondly, holiness is that which is done in love for God, according to the standards of His law. The law of God is the expression of God's holy character and the outline of the way of holiness that humanity is supposed to walk in as His image bearers. If you are going to present yourselves to God for service it has to be in accordance with His law. You cannot decide that holy behaviour consists in not eating any blue M&Ms and any yellow jelly beans ever again. We must also pursue holiness according to the true intentions not merely a superficial reading of the law. Holiness consists in not merely not killing but seeking our neighbour's good; not only in not committing adultery but seeking to strengthen our marriages; not only not lying but having the truth on our lips to edify and teach others. Holiness consists then in a full submission to God's standards and not merely some of them. If I decide that I like the not killing and lying commands because don't want anyone doing those things to me, but I will ignore God's will about drink and sex, partial obedience is disguised self-service. You will notice that Paul calls us to present all of ourselves and not only those parts that are convenient or fashionable.

In our day we need to stress this because we have seen a replacement of God's law with the law of love. Today everything is justified in the name of love. People kill for love, commit adultery for love, lie for love, condone homosexual marriage in the name of love, sex before marriage is justified by love. If our love is pursued outside the lines of God's law we have made our love higher than God's law, our desires more important than His.

Thirdly, holiness is living a life of obedience to God's law, from a heart of love, in the spirit of humility. Humility includes several things. Firstly, it is the spirit of a servant that is willing to do any task. It does not think of itself as better than others and too good for any job. Secondly, humility is honest about the sin in our lives and has no pride before God and no excuses for disobedience. We know we sin because of what we are and do not try to blame others or the situation we are in. Thirdly, humility sees itself as weak and dependant and looks to God in prayer. Poor people beg, prayer is the language of the poor in spirit.

So then if you seek to do anything out of love for God, in accordance to His word in the spirit of humility this is holiness. No matter what you are doing that is holiness. You could be doing the ironing at home, by embracing your domestic responsibilities as a gift from God and a way to serve Him, if you do them with this love, lawfulness and humility you are living a holy life. I could go around every part of our lives and mention every member of our bodies and draw up a hundred ways in which we can use them positively, but this gets to the heart of how we present our whole selves to God. If the motivation of your doing is out of heart of love for what God has done for you; if the pattern of your doing is according to the Law which was given to us a code of conduct; and if the attitude we have is one of humble servanthood. No matter what we do, this is holiness. To encourage these three things you need to, fall more in love with God by considering who He is and what He has done; know the Bible which will equip you for every good work; and keep an honest eye on your worth, sins and abilities.

I must qualify that this is not the holiness that is pleasing to God by which we earn our way into heaven. No this is a holiness that is pleasing to the Lord, who receives our efforts as a Father would receive the efforts of His child, and they are acceptable to Him because they are done while we are in Christ.

Not by playing dead

Next you will notice that Paul calls us to acts as people who are alive and not as people who are dead, 'but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life.' Some of us have seen dogs that know various kinds of tricks. Some shake hands, some sit up on their hind legs, some even walk. But there are also those who are taught to roll over and play dead. Some dogs are trained to only listen to their masters and no one else's commands. When a Christian returns to sin, they are listening to the wrong master tell them to roll over and play dead. Playing dead means going back to the way we once were when we were in Adam. In Adam we were puppets, who followed every desire that was contrary to God, we were slaves to passion and had no real desire for holiness or God. Paul is basically telling us to stop playing dead, and act like those who have been brought from death to life. John Stott puts it like this, 'Regenerate Christians should no more contemplate a return to unregenerate living than adults to their childhood, married people to their singleness or discharged prisoners to their prison cell. For our union with Jesus Christ has severed us from the old life and committed us to the new. Our baptisms stands between the two like a door between two rooms, closing on the one and opening into the other. We have died, and we have risen. How can we possibly live again in what we have died to?'¹

So let me ask you, are you living like one who is alive, or are you playing dead? Have you developed moral senility and relapsed into a former age?

¹ P180.

Not a once off action

One of the classic mistakes that have been made in reading this verse is to think that we offer ourselves to God only once. The Keswick teachers said that you needed to have a crisis experience where you were so desperate for a breakthrough in holiness that you got serious with God and made sure that every single part of your life was consecrated to God. It was taught that when you offered yourself so, and trusted in Jesus to kill your sins that you would experience a second blessing which would enable you to live a holy life more easier from there on in. However, when Paul talks about presenting our members as instruments to God for righteousness he is not implying that this is done only once at the beginning of one's Christian life and then that is all. No he is implying that we present ourselves to God every day and in every way.

We are all familiar with Martin Luther the Roman Catholic Monk who the Lord used to bring about the Reformation. We know of the 95 theses that were nailed to the university doors that were spread far and wide promoting many true things. Let me read to you the very first thesis that Luther wrote: 'When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, 'Repent,' He meant that the entire life of believers should be a life of repentance.' This is what Paul is talking about. We live our whole lives turning from sin and turning to God. We do not do it only once when we are converted but this act of forsaking sin and embracing God is a daily action. We do not get justified more than once, but we re-enact this experience of repentance as a lifestyle.

For the concluding part of this message let me outline the basic steps of repentance hoping that we will learn to live a lifestyle of repenting. You will see that this description will attempt to move from sin to obedience, from the putting away of sin to the pursuing of God's will in love. We will use Psalm 51 as a guide for this ongoing act of turning from sin to obedience. You will remember that David has committed adultery with Bathsheba, he had refused to repent justifying his sin for a whole year until the prophet Nathan confronted him with his sin. As we see David turning to God in prayer, we recognise that the Spirit of God has written this prayer of repentance as instruction for God's people.

Firstly, David comes to a God of mercy who is rich in love and asks for God to deal with him according to His grace not to the measure of David's sins. 1-2, 'Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin!' When we blow it we need to know that the God we approach is rich in grace. It never fails to amaze how a man as sinful as David could come with such confidence to God. He really understood God's character and His faithfulness to His covenant with His people.

Secondly, David owns his sins. He does not make excuses but sees their source not in his circumstances, not in Bathsheba, not in God, but the root of his sin is in himself, and God would be just if He punished David. 3-6, 'For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment. Behold, I was brought

forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me. Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart.'

Thirdly, David asks for cleansing, for God to reignite his first love, and renewal in the joy of his salvation. 7-12, 'Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have broken rejoice. Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.'

Fourthly, after receiving grace and forgiveness David commits himself to proclaiming the glory of God's name by teaching other sinners about grace, and by worshipping God. He asks for God to enable this obedient witness and worship. 13-17, 'Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you. Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your righteousness. O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.'

David's experience is very similar to Isaiah's where we see Isaiah seeing his sin, feeling condemned, but then God cleanses him, and when God asks, 'who will go for us?' Isaiah replies, 'Lord send me.' True heartfelt love and obedience is a response to God's work of cleansing and restoration. And if we are not often taking our sins to God for forgiveness, to have the joy of our salvation restored in the magnitude of His love towards us in Christ, then we will fail to get to the place where we are willing to go and bursting to sing and speak about the God of grace. Daily repentance is the key to daily love driven, law oriented, humble holiness.