



HOLINESS

Tracking the New Testament pathway

John Benton

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1. The necessity of holiness: the character of God

Worldly people sometimes complain with reason that “religious” persons are not so amiable and unselfish...as others who make no profession of religion...Sound Protestant and Evangelical doctrine is useless if it is not accompanied by a holy life. It is worse than useless; it does positive harm...and brings religion into contempt...We want a thorough revival about Scriptural holiness. J C Ryle

Peter's ringing exhortation is: 'But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy"', 1 Peter 1:15,16. This text shows that the character of God is both the pattern for our holiness and the reason why Christians must seek holiness.

The pattern of holiness

The root of the word 'holy' means something like 'to cut', 'to separate', 'to set apart', or perhaps 'to shine'. When used of God they refer to:

1. The separateness of God

He is separate from creation and elevated far above it, Isaiah 57:15. He is different in his very mode of being. Nothing in all creation is comparable to him, Isaiah 40:25.

2. The absolute perfection of God

God is light, 1 John 1:5, and nothing else but light. *Holiness is more than a mere attribute of God – it is the sum of all his attributes, the outshining of all that God is.* Jonathan Edwards; Isaiah 6:3.

3. The complete absence of sin in God

God can have no truck at all with sin, Habakkuk 1:3. Not only is God without sin, he is violently at enmity with sin, James 4:4,5.

Holiness cascades through everything that God is and does. We must have a balanced view of holiness which emphasizes equally both opposition to all evil and rejoicing in all that is good. Exodus 34:6,7.

We see holiness in all its perfect balance in the Lord Jesus Christ, who is God become man, John 14.9.

The necessity of holiness

Personal holiness declines when the church does not see its necessity. Somehow the connection between God being holy and our need to be holy has often been obscured.

Why? The atheism and agnosticism of our society has subtly affected many Christians' view of salvation and justification by faith alone. If there is no God, or we are unsure about God, then we naturally become the centre of our own thinking. Our world is man-centred. Influenced by this, when we come to see the Biblical truth that Christ has done everything necessary for our salvation, we tend to stop there. We see no urgent need for holiness. It is relegated to being an added extra for the extra keen Christian.

But in Scripture holiness is a necessity for all, Galatians 5:19-21. The reason is that the Scriptures are God-centred, not man-centred. God has his own purpose in our salvation. It is that we should be holy, like him, and so know and enjoy him, to the praise of his glory, Ephesians 1:4; Titus 2:14; Hebrews 12.14.

We do not strive for holiness in order to get saved, neither do we primarily strive for holiness in order to prove that we are saved (that can be a terrible bondage too). We strive for holiness because that is what God has saved us for. He is making a holy people for himself, 1 Thessalonians 4:3-4.

Our holiness before God has three components

1. We are holy before God FORENSICALLY

The perfect life and death of Christ for us makes us holy and totally acceptable in the sight of God's law, 2 Corinthians 5:21.

2. We are holy before God CONSTITUTIONALLY

We have been born again by the Holy Spirit who now dwells within us. Thus we are set apart as holy to God, John 3:3.

3. We are in the process of becoming holy before God PRACTICALLY

It is this practical holiness which 1 Peter 1:15,16 has in view. All who are truly the Lord's begin to lead a holy life. We call this process of becoming holy in practice 'sanctification'.

2. The nature of holiness: transformation through consecration

God has set us apart for himself and we are to respond by consciously setting ourselves apart for him. As we sustain and renew this consecration and dedication to God, so we grow in practical holiness.

The idea of consecration

1. We are to give ourselves exclusively to God

We must devote ourselves to Christ alone as the Lord of our lives, 1 Peter 3:15; Matthew 6:24. We must smash our idols.

2. We are to give ourselves as slaves to God

Consciously placing ourselves totally at God's disposal is a recurring theme in Paul's letters, Romans 6:13, 19. We positively offer ourselves to God to do his will not ours, Romans 12:1.

The Old Testament gives many illustrations of consecration. The Nazirite was a man or woman specially separated to God, Numbers 6:1-21. Samuel was dedicated to serve God from birth, 1 Samuel 1:11, 28. Nehemiah dedicated himself to rebuild Jerusalem's walls, Nehemiah 6:3.

The practice of consecration

1. The vow

In the OT, consecration was usually initiated by a promise to God. Just so, in becoming Christians and being baptized as disciples, we have vowed to devote ourselves to obeying Christ, Matthew 28:19,20.

Repentance means turning from as much as you know of your sin to give as much as you know of yourself to as much as you know of your God, and as our knowledge grows at these three points so our practice of repentance has to be enlarged. J. I. Packer.

Thus, there may well be times when it is appropriate to rededicate ourselves to God, James 4:7.

2. The life

The OT viewed special items and times as holy. For the Christian all of life has become holy. Our personal life, family life, employment, church life, responsibilities as citizens – every area of our experience is to be consciously based on the awareness of having been separated for God, Ephesians 4:22,

Ephesians 5:22,25, 6:5,9. Strangely, this makes us more caring about other people, not less Mark 6:34.

3. The discipline

There is no such thing as 'instant holiness'. Consecration inevitably involves discipline – battling the world, the flesh and the devil, 1 Timothy 4:17; Hebrews 12:1.

Incentives to consecration

We may be discouraged, feeling we could never progress in holiness. But Scripture tells us that, in Christ, ordinary Christians can please God, Ephesians 5:10; Philippians 4:18; Colossians 3.20.

The new birth

Becoming Christians, we were given a new nature and the Spirit's presence. We are not on our own. As we cooperate, the Holy Spirit gives us power to make progress, Galatians 5:17.

Being like Jesus

The Christian is someone who loves Christ, 1 Corinthians 16:22. We see the Lord's purity, humility, unselfishness, forgiveness and compassion and we long to be like him, 1 John 3:1-3.

God's promises

It is in the context of the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus calls us to live like him, that he says, 'Ask and it shall be given to you...', Matthew 7:7-12. There is help very much available to us.

The influence of a holy life

Holy living brings credit to Christianity and influences the consciences of the lost as nothing else. For the good of our fellow men and women we ought to seek to be holy, Mark 6:20; 1 Peter 3:1,2. We want to lead them to Christ.

Closer fellowship with God

It is the teaching of all of Scripture that holy people get to know God much more intimately than anyone else on earth, John 14:23; Ephesians 4:30. This brings ultimate joy, Matthew 5.8.

3. The context of holiness: justification in Christ

We are not to confuse justification and sanctification.

Sanctification is that process of growing in practical holiness. It has to do with a person's character, his/her moral and spiritual quality.

Justification has nothing to do with a person's character. It has to do with their status before God.

The meaning of justification

Justification is a word from a court of law.

1. Justification is the act of the judge when he declares someone righteous. When a judge declares a person guilty, he is said to condemn that person. Justification is the opposite, Deuteronomy 25:1; Proverbs 17:15; Romans 8:33,34. It is the declaration of innocence.

2. Justification does not alter the person themselves, but it alters their status in the eyes of the law.

When a person is justified their status is 'not guilty'. They can walk free, acceptable in the judge's eyes.

5. Justification is the act of God.

We cannot and do not justify ourselves, Romans 8:33.

4. Justification includes the following:

a. Forgiveness of all our sins: This covers every sin and it is irreversible, 1 John 1:7; Romans 8:34,35.

b. An assertion of righteousness: Amazingly, God does not say 'guilty, but forgiven', he says 'not guilty'.

c. Peace with God: The judge does not remain aloof, he becomes 'our Father', Romans 5:1.

The ground of Justification

On what basis can God do these things? After all we are guilty of sin, Romans 4:5

The whole logic of justification lies in the phrase 'in Christ Jesus'. The work of the Lord Jesus Christ provides God's right to do it. A mysterious exchange (or substitution) has taken place between Christ and the sinner. On the cross all our

sins were reckoned to Christ and paid for by him, Galatians 3:13.
In exchange for our sins, Christ gave us his righteousness, Romans 3:21.22;
Romans 5:18.

The instrument of justification

What does God require of us in order for us to be justified? The answer is FAITH ALONE.

1. Faith is not meritorious

Our faith does not earn us anything. Its function is not to procure or merit, but simply to unite us to Christ. It is Christ who has earned everything for us, Romans 4:23-25.

2. Faith in what?

It is faith in Jesus. He is the object of our faith. We are not called to have faith in faith. 'If I believe hard enough I'll be saved'. We are not to look at our faith, but to look to Christ, Acts 16:31.

3. Faith alone

We are not saved by faith plus keeping the law, or growth in grace, or receiving the sacraments. It is faith plus nothing, Galatians 5:6. ALL the glory goes to God, Romans 3.27.

Justification and sanctification

1. Justification provides the proper motivation for sanctification.

We do not seek holiness in order to merit anything with God. That is dreadful bondage, Galatians 5:1. But having been freely justified we want to live to please God out of thankfulness, Colossians 2:6,7.

2. Justification provides the proper freedom in which to pursue sanctification.

As we seek to be holy we will sometimes mess up. But the truth of justification assures us that we are still forgiven. The Christian will not use this as an excuse to sin, but will rejoice in the freedom from a condemning conscience that this brings him, 1 John 1:9, and press on walking with God.

If we forget justification and fall back into thinking our status before God depends on our degree of success in sanctification, we are headed for trouble. But, praise God, we can be free of that.

4. The root of holiness: co-crucifixion and co-resurrection with Christ

Justification is so thorough that we may be tempted to think it is okay to go on living in sin – sanctification is irrelevant. In Romans chapter 6, Paul answers this idea and in doing so he reveals to us vital aspects of the Christian's true identity. We review the teaching of Romans 6:1-14.

1. Christian baptism portrays our union with Christ in his death and resurrection, 6:3-4

Our being immersed, going under the water portrays death and burial, Colossians 2:12.

Our coming up out of the water, portrays rising from the dead, Romans 6:4.

The believer has been united with Christ in God's plan from eternity past. Faith actualizes that union and baptism symbolizes it, Ephesians 1;4, 13.

2. Christ died to sin and his resurrection was a resurrection to God, 6:7-10

What is this death to sin? In determining this, 3 points should be recognised.

a. It cannot mean that Christ died to sin within himself, because Christ was sinless, 1 Peter 2:22.

b. It is something which is common to all people who die, Romans 6:7.

c. Paul's statement in Romans 5:21 immediately precedes this chapter and therefore gives us an important clue to the answer.

When Christ came to this fallen world, he entered a domain where sin (and its concomitants, law, death and the devil) reigns. In this sense he had placed himself in a relationship to sin, Galatians 4:4; Romans 8:3. But when he died, that relationship to sin was ended. He passed out of the realm where sin reigns. His resurrection showed that the realm of sin and death could not hold him, and he passed into a new sphere, a new realm of newness and life in God, Romans.6;4,9,10; Luke 24:36,51.

3. Through our union with Christ we have died to sin and we are alive to God, 6:2-6

This dying and rising again of Christians is something which is comprehended in the historical reality of Christ's death and resurrection. It is a past fact. United to

him, he did not just die *for* us, we died *with* him, Romans 6:8. He did not rise alone, we rose *with* him, Colossians 3:1.

This death and resurrection is appropriated to believers when they are first joined to Christ by faith. It is not something that is going to happen or ought to happen. If you are a Christian, it has happened.

We no longer belong to the 'country of sin', we have become citizens of the kingdom of Christ, Colossians 1:13; Philippians 3:20. We have changed masters. Our master is no longer sin, but God, Romans 6:17,18. We have changed our spiritual genus. We no longer belong to Adam, we are of the race of which Christ is the head, Romans 6:3. We have become new creations, 2 Corinthians 5:17. Our old self has been killed, sin has been dethroned in our hearts, Romans 6:6. At the very centre of our being, the Spirit has created a new 'us', with a 'heart after God', cf. Romans 8:7 and Romans 7:22.

4. Since we have died to sin and are alive to God, we must reckon that it is so, 6:11

The Christian must cultivate a new self-judgement. We must believe these facts about ourselves. We must count ourselves to have changed in these ways. In other words, we must believe this aspect of the gospel. This will help us say 'No' to sin because we recognise that sin is ultimately foreign to us, our well-being and our true identity.

5. As a result of who we now are, we must resist sin and offer ourselves to God, 6:13

We must do this, not out of duty primarily, but because of what we have become in Christ. Our new inner self will only be satisfied as we learn to be in action what we already are at heart, Colossians 3:1-4,9,10; 1 John 3:9. For the Christian to yield to sin is to do violence to his new nature, which explains why backsliding Christians are often miserable.

If I had to summarise NT ethics in one sentence, here's how I would put it: be who you are...the you that you are by grace. Kevin DeYoung

Holiness is the "naturalness" of the spiritually risen man or woman. As we cooperate with God's purposes for us and the desires of our new nature, we can be confident that we will make progress in holiness, Romans 6:4,5,14.

5. The agent of holiness: the Holy Spirit

Because we have died with Christ and have been raised with him to newness of life, the Christian has a new nature which can only find fulfilment in holy living. But although we have this intention, where are we to find the power to do this? The answer of the NT is the activity of the Holy Spirit within us.

Romans 7 and 8

In Romans 7:6, we have the overall theme of what follows in 7:7-8:27. It tells us that the Spirit has entered where the law has failed. Although God's law is good in itself, it cannot give us the power to overcome sin and live for God.

Paul proves this by referring to his own experience. In 7:7-13 Paul's pre-conversion experience shows that the law only stirred up his fallen nature to want to do what was wrong, 7:8, and then made him feel guilty before God, 7:9,10. In 7:14-25 Paul then shows that in his post-conversion experience, although he now wants to please God, 7:22 (cf. 8.7), in himself he has no power to do that, 7:18. But through the power of the Holy Spirit, although it is still a battle, the Christian is able to make progress against sin, Romans 8:13; Galatians 5:16-18.

NB. The antithesis between the law and the Spirit is not that the Spirit places himself over against the content of the law. Rather, the object of sending the Spirit is that the law might be fulfilled in us, 8:3,4.

Living by the Holy Spirit

What Romans 6 called no longer being subservient to sin on the ground of our union with Christ in his resurrection, is termed in Romans 7:6 serving God in the new state of the Spirit. By virtue of this same union with Christ we participate in the Holy Spirit, for the Spirit is the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ, Philippians 1:19; Galatians 4:6; 2 Corinthians 3:18.

Whoever is joined to Christ by faith is one Spirit with him, 1 Corinthians 6:17. Whoever by faith is incorporated into the body of Christ, is baptized into the Spirit as the one who fills the body of Christ, 1 Corinthians 12:13. So, all true Christians know the Holy Spirit, and his power is available to us all.

We live by the Spirit as we, by faith, use the means of grace the Spirit has given us. Christ is the Man of the Spirit, who gives the Spirit to all who thirst, John 7.37

-39. The Bible is the Spirit's book, 2 Peter 1:20,21, full of the precious promises of God, 2 Peter 1.4. The church is the Spirit's people, spiritually gifted to build up each other, 1 Corinthians 12.7. We must make disciplined efforts to use the means of grace, trusting not in our efforts, but the Spirit's power to make them effective for us.

The Spirit works through means – through the objective means of grace, namely Biblical truth, prayer, fellowship, worship and the Lord's Supper – and with them through the subjective means of grace whereby we open ourselves to change, namely, thinking, listening, examining oneself, admonishing oneself, sharing what is in one's heart with others and weighing their response. J I Packer

Being filled with the Spirit

If the Holy Spirit is so vital to our life and progress as Christians it is no wonder that the NT commands us to be filled with the Spirit in an ongoing way, Ephesians 5:18.

There is no special formula for filling with the Spirit. It occurs in the same way that we were born of the Spirit in the first place – through repentance and faith, Acts 2.38; Colossians 2.6,7. As we use the means of grace and open our hearts we will be led into increasing repentance and faith – emptying out the ways of the old self to be filled with the Spirit.

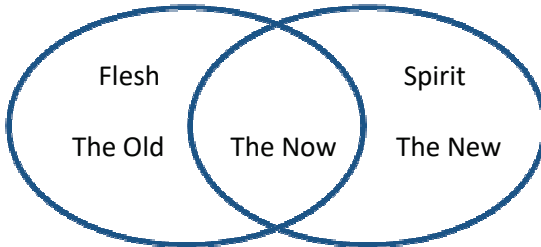
N.B. Without this emphasis it is possible to be a Christian and not be filled as we should be.

Considering Luke 11:9-13, here are six reasons why this may be so.

- a. We do not ask for the Spirit, 11:13.
- b. We see no urgent need, 11:5-8.
- c. Unconfessed sin which grieves the Spirit, 11:4.
- d. Fear - the Father's gifts have no sting, 11:11,12.
- e. Unbelief – our Father who will give good things, 11:3.
- f. Thinking we are on a higher level, not needing to be filled again, 11.9-10.

6. The experience of holiness: conflict and trust

The Christian is not in heaven yet! Though we are no longer under the dominion of sin, we are still open to its influences. We presently live in a body of fallen flesh and in this fallen world where the devil is active. We are in the Spirit, but we are also still in the flesh, Romans 7:24.



It is the reality of this overlap in which we live which determines the character of Christian experience, Galatians 5:17.

The Overlap: a life of FAITH

We are not in heaven yet, so we live by faith, Galatians 2:20. Faith is the means and mode of the new life. By faith we may see ourselves as dead to sin and alive to God, Romans 6:11, Colossians 2:12.

It is faith by which the Spirit communicates himself to us, Galatians 3:2.

N.B. The indissoluble bond between the Spirit and Christ is of vital importance. The Spirit does not work as an anonymous, miraculous power, but as the Spirit of Christ. The manner in which we share in the Spirit is therefore determined by our relationship to Christ, i.e. faith in him, Ephesians 3:16, 17.

The Overlap: a life of ACTION

The overlap is the land of the in-between. We still have easy access to old habits, old haunts, old emotions, which tempt us to sin. We also have the Holy Spirit with us. The Spirit of God gives us power for holiness as we trust him. But he does not do the work for us, Romans 8:13. The NT calls us to be active, not passive, in our pursuit of holiness, Colossians 3:5, Philippians 2:12; Ephesians 4:25, 29.

N.B. Texts like Galatians 2:20 do not teach that we are to be passive, not to strive, but to let Christ take over. Christ does not possess us like a demon. Rather

it teaches that the self-justifying, self-sufficient 'I' is replaced by 'I' who is totally dependent on Christ, as the second part of the verse makes plain. Paul is making a statement of living by faith in Christ, not of the rejection of his own identity or action.

The Overlap: a life of BATTLE

Because we are both in the flesh and in the Spirit, the Christian life is characterized by battle all the way to heaven, Galatians 5:17; Ephesians 6.10-18. *A holy violence, a conflict, a warfare, a fight, a soldier's life, a wrestling, are spoken of as characteristic of the true Christian.* J C Ryle. So finding the going hard does not mean we are failures – it is normal for the Christian.

If we fight depending on our own strength, we are bound to be defeated, Romans 7:18. But this is a battle based on the victory of Christ and, in the power of the Spirit, we can win victories. 1 John 5:4.

The Overlap: a life of TRANSFORMATION

We should draw much encouragement from the fact that, as we respond in faith, God uses even our trials and difficulties to fashion our characters and make us more like the Lord Jesus, Romans 5:3,4. The NT uses the illustration of a father disciplining his children in explaining why the Christian life is not easy, Hebrews 12:7-12. The apostle Peter greatly encourages us by telling us that when God has finished his transforming and refining work it will be glorious, 1 Peter 1:7.

The reason we find tension and difficulty in the Christian life is because we have new life within us which is straining towards heaven. The very fact that we often find contradictions within ourselves of the most profound kind is evidence that we are both in the flesh and IN THE SPIRIT, Romans 8.23.

7. The rule of holiness: God's revealed law

The OT laws composed of moral, civil and ceremonial commands can be thought of as a whole and aimed at God's covenant nation, Israel. But there is a law which applies to the whole world, Romans 3:19, whose requirements are written on the hearts of even the Gentiles, Romans 2:14, 15.

Keeping this law would lead to eternal life, Matthew 19.16-20. But it is our failure to keep this law which defines, 1 John 3.4, and exposes our sin, Romans 7:7, and our need of salvation, 1 Timothy 1.8-11. **This law is the 10 commandments.** The centre and fountainhead of Israel's laws, nevertheless, they apply to us all. *Why? First*, it is because they stand on the two great, reasonable requirements of us as creatures to love God and to love our fellow men. *Second*, it is because these commandments are something of an exposition of the character of God, in whose image all humanity is made.

That the 10 commandments are set apart from the rest of the OT laws is seen in that a) these 10 'words' alone were spoken from Sinai by the voice of God, Exodus 20:1, 18-19; b) only these laws were written on tablets of stone; c) only these laws were kept in the ark of the covenant.

As Christians, the 10 commandments, still form the moral framework of our lives. Their relevance to us can be understood through three crucial phrases we find in the NT.

Not under law but under grace, Romans 6:14

When we became Christians we 'died to the law', Romans 7:4. That is, we have been removed from the whole regime of the law as a system by which we must try to earn our salvation by our deeds.

Christ has done everything that is necessary for us, 1 Corinthians 1:30. Salvation is a free gift which we simply receive by faith with thankfulness, Romans 6:23.

Not to abolish... but to fulfil, Matthew 5:17

1. Christ came to fulfil the OT, Matthew 5:17,18. Jesus does not conceive of his ministry in terms of opposition to the OT law but of bringing to fruition that toward which it points. The Law and the Prophets, far from being abolished, find their valid continuity and fulfilment in Jesus and his kingdom.

2. Christian living fulfils the law, Matthew 5:19,20. Becoming a Christian includes the law being written by the Spirit on our hearts, Jeremiah 31:33. The Spirit works with the intention and aspiration that the righteous requirements of the law should be fully met by us, Romans 8:4.

Not free from God's law but... under Christ's law, 1 Corinthians 9:21

Although the NT commands flow out of those of the OT, Romans 15.4, because Moses' law was given into a particular historical situation, before Christ had come and at a time when God's people were an earthly nation, there are differences between the law of Moses and the law of Christ.

A rough rule of thumb for understanding the change between OT and NT is to divide the OT law into the 3 categories of moral, civil and ceremonial. The civil law of Israel no longer applies because God's people are no longer an earthly nation, cf. Leviticus 20:10; John 8:1-11; Revelation 21:8. The ceremonial law of sacrificial worship has gone because it has all been consummated in Christ's sacrifice, Acts 6:14; Hebrews 9.11-14. The moral law still remains, but must be read in the light of Christ and particularly his Sermon from the mountain.

The Sermon on the Mount introduces us to the law of Christ and shows how Christ does not relax the laws of Moses, but goes beyond them in their righteousness, Matthew 5.18-20, while promising us help from our heavenly Father in living to fulfil the law, Matthew 7:7-12. Especially, Christ is concerned with the spirit and essence of the OT law rather than mere outward observance, e.g. Matthew 5:21,22.

The emphasis of Christ's new commandment is 'love, as I have loved you', John 13:34.

With its negative 'You-shall-nots' we might think of the 10 commandments forming the boundaries of acceptable behaviour and now Jesus commands us to fill the area within those boundaries with Christ-like, sacrificial love, to the glory of God and the blessing of humanity, Romans 13:8-10; 1 John 3:16.

8. The heart of holiness: the Spirit of love

In the NT, love is given the highest priority, Colossians 3:14. It is the legitimate outworking of faith, Galatians 5:6. It is the fulfilment of all the commandments, Romans 13:10. It is the top rung on the ladder of Christian virtue, 2 Peter 1:7. Without love we are nothing as Christians, 1 Corinthians 13:1-3.

The definition of love

The love of God is the original love and the definition of all true love, 1 John 4:8. This is exemplified

- a. in the Father's love for the world in giving his only begotten Son for us, 1 John 4:9,10; Romans 5:8.
- b. In Christ's love for us at Calvary as he laid down his life, 1 John 3:16; John 15:13.

The word reserved for this kind of love in the NT is the Greek word *agape*. It had no significant pre-Christian usage and the NT writers poured into it the meaning of love as defined by God's love.

The motivation to love

Gospel motives, not legal motives move the Christian to live a life of love. We are moved to love because we are the recipients of God's love, 1 John 4:19; 2 Corinthians 5:14; Ephesians 4:32 - 5:2.

It is impossible for us to truly know God's love and fail to love others, 1 John 4:20, 21; Matthew 18:21-35.

The activity of love

Love is not just a feeling, but rather a way of behaving out of affection. Starting in our hearts, love must become benevolent action if it is truly to be love. Love does something; it gives. That is how it establishes its identity, John 3:16. **Giving** is the activity of love, 1 John 5:11.

Lust is that which desires to have or take possession of its object for its own satisfaction. Love is that which gives to its object and seeks its welfare and glory, Acts 20:34, 35. God's love is a love which intends to confer, not limited help, but unbounded blessing, Galatians 4:4,5; 1 John 3:1; Ephesians 3:8. It is love which spares no cost, Romans 8:32. Christ gave himself for us.

The objects of love

The Christian is to love God who first loved us, 1 John 4:19; 1 Corinthians 16:22. Love to God is the essence and well-spring of holiness for it leads to obedience, John 14:23.

The Christian is to love his neighbour, Matthew 22:39; Romans 13:9. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus points out that our neighbour is anyone we are in a position to help, Luke 10:29-37.

But *agape* love does not depend upon the attractiveness of its object, Deuteronomy 7:7; 9:6; 10:14,15.

Thus it comes to embrace at last even the unlovely and the enemy, Matthew 5:44; Romans 5:6-10.

The threats to love

The whole spirit of our age encourages us to live our lives by taking instead of giving. It is a world of desires and cravings which clamour to be satisfied, 1 John 2:15-17.

For the Christian there are three major ways in which love can be impotent in our lives.

1. Good intentions which do not lead to actions. We must not love simply in word, 1 John 3:18.
2. Good actions which do not flow from loving motives. The temptation is ever present to act grudgingly or merely dutifully, or to be seen and applauded by other people, Matthew-6:1-4.
3. Good doctrine which fails to translate into love – orthodoxy without orthopraxy, Luke 10.32.

The end of love

NT love is the pinnacle of worship because our love for God has spilled over into imitating God; it is true likeness to God, 1 John 4:7, in holiness and Christlikeness, Matthew 5:44-48 (cf. 1 Peter 1:15).

Love is the ultimate argument for the truth of Christianity. Through Christ-like love, God is made manifest to us, John 14.21, and to an unbelieving world, 1 John 4:12. In knowing God is our ultimate delight, Matthew 5.8. We find a wholeness and joy which the world simply cannot match or explain.

9. Some personal applications

1. We have noted that transformation comes through consecration to God.

Identify the idols in your life - the things you look to in order to hold your life together which are not of God.

Ask the Lord to expose them and to lead you into repentance.

Rededicate your life to Christ.

2. We have seen that holy living is the behaviour which alone fits with who we have now become through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Look up the following texts (and others which occur to you) and write a description of who you now are in Christ according to Scripture:

Colossians 3:1, 12, 15; Hebrews 10:14; 1 John 3:1 - 3; Revelation 1:5(b), 6.

Ask God to help you believe and accept that this description is your true identity.

3. Look up and write out Philippians 1:6.

In prayer thank God for the truth of this verse.

The most common explanation of the term 'holiness' is that it means 'to be separate', 'to be cut off from'... There is a good measure of truth in this. But in my own view it starts from the wrong place. It describes the Creator's attribute of holiness from the viewpoint of the creature; it describes his purity from the standpoint of the sinner.

(But) any description we give of what God is like in himself...must be true quite apart from his work of creation...it must be true of God simply as he always existed as the eternal Trinity. But in that case, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit had no 'attribute' that involved separation...What then is God's holiness? What do we mean when we say 'Holy Father' and 'Holy Son' and 'Holy Spirit' and 'Holy Trinity'?

We mean the perfect devotion of each of these three persons to the other two. We mean...absolute, permanent, exclusive, pure, irreversible and fully expressed devotion. (This) is not something mechanical, or formal, or legal, or even performance based. It is personal. In a sense 'holiness' is a way of describing love. To say that 'God is love' and to say that 'God is holy' ultimately is to point to the same reality.

If this is what holiness means in God, then in us it must also be a correspondingly deeply personal, intense, loving devotion to him...

Sinclair Ferguson
Devoted to God

One of the teachers of the law...asked him, 'Of all the commandments, which is the most important?'

'The most important one,' answered Jesus, 'is this: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord your God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength." The second is this: "Love your neighbour as yourself." There is no commandment greater than these.'

Mark 12:28-31