

Identifying the Target (Part Two): The Church's Manner

Read Ephesians 3:20-21 — “to him be glory in the church” — What does that look like?

This morning we are continuing our three week series called,

“Identifying the Target: Understanding the Church’s Mission, Manner, & Message”.

As a reminder, our focus is on the question ***HOW***.

- ***HOW do we actually faithfully follow Christ in all of life?***
- Or, to put it another way: ***What are we supposed to be aiming at as Christians?***

Last week we considered **the Church’s Mission**. Let me remind you of what we learned:

First of all, we learned that the Church’s Mission includes ***two*** central things, not just ***one***:

1. The continual perfecting of the saints

(That is, our ongoing sanctification or growth in holiness/Christlikeness)

2. The ingathering of the elect from all nations.

(That is, we are called to be devoted to evangelism or proclaiming Christ among the nations)

However, we also learned something very important about the relationship between the Church’s call to pursue holiness/Christlikeness and the Church’s call to reach the lost.

We learned that these things are ***not opposed to one another***, but rather, by God’s design they actually work in ***tandem***.

According to the Bible, God actually uses the holiness of his people to fulfill the work of evangelism in the world.

- 1. God uses the holiness/Christlikeness of his Church to actually CONFIRM the truth of our message to the world.**
 - Holiness shows the world the our message to true, that our faith is real, and that ***Christ’s ministry actually comes with TRANSFORMING POWER that not only forgives and cleanses us from sin, but actually delivers us from sin’s reign.***
- 2. We also learned that God uses the pursuit of holiness among his people to actually prepare them to be effective witnesses for Christ by making them SPIRITUALLY MATURE.**

And so, according to the Bible the Church’s Mission includes ***the continual perfecting of the saints AS THE VERY CATALYST to equipping the church to gather the elect from all nations by the gospel of Jesus Christ.***

But, now the question is: ***With what sort of MANNER are we to go about this God-given mission?***

It is one thing to know ***WHAT*** you are supposed to be aiming at. It is quite another thing to know ***HOW*** to aim at it.

And this is the focus of our sermon today. **With what MANNER has God called us to pursue the perfecting of the saints and the ingathering of the elect?**

The Perfection of the Saints:

We will begin by considering some (not all) of what the Bible teaches us about the **MANNER** with which we are to pursue on the ongoing perfecting of the saints, or, our continual growth in holiness and Christlikeness as Christians.

In order to organize our thoughts about this subject I will place our consideration under four questions:

1. With what kind of **PRIORITY** are we called to pursue the perfecting of the saints in holiness?
2. With what kind of **EFFORT**?
3. To what **EXTENT**? (*i.e. How holy is holy enough?*)
4. In **WHAT SPIRIT** and with **WHAT SPECIFIC KINDS OF ACTIONS**?

Let's consider what the Bible says about each of these things now.

1. With what kind of **PRIORITY** is the perfecting of the saints to be pursued?

Matthew 6:33 | Our Savior is so helpful to us. He does not leave us in a fog but makes his will plain.

- He tells us that the “**first**” or “**chief**” or “**preeminent**” priority of our lives as Christians is to “***seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness***”. This is priority number one.
- Striving to be faithful to God is above and before all other concerns, aims, or interests.

Luke 9:23-25 | Jesus teaches us that this priority is not merely an **occasional** priority or a **Sunday-only** priority, but a **DAILY** priority.

- Followers of Jesus Christ are called to deny themselves and take up their cross in pursuit of faithful obedience to Christ “**daily**”.
- **V25** — Jesus goes on to show us the priority of faithfully pursuing him in the most emphatic terms (**READ**).
- It is hard to imagine how Jesus could have made the priority pursuing faithful obedience to him more clear.

2. What what kind of effort?

John 15:4-5 | We must never forget that **APART FROM CHRIST'S HELP**, as he indwells us by his Spirit, **WE CAN DO NOTHING OF SPIRITUAL BENEFIT OR VALUE**. Not even one thing. No progress at all.

- **BUT** the fact that we can only grow by God's grace, **DOES NOT REMOVE OUR RESPONSIBILITY** to faithfully use the *strength, abilities, and opportunities* God gives to us to the **FULLEST EXTENT POSSIBLE**.
- The reality that we are totally and utterly dependent on God's help to make any progress in holiness does not mean we simply sit around passively waiting for God to suddenly zap us with spiritual growth.
- No, it means that, because we love God and because we trust that God's ways are always best, we give the pursuit of holiness everything we have!
- **But we do so by faith in GOD'S PROMISE** to meet us in this holy pursuit, and **we do so in humble-dependence upon GOD'S POWER** to make our efforts effective for his glory and our good.
- **Let me show you just a couple of the ways that the Bible speaks of the Christian's call to exhibit continuous and strenuous effort toward growth in holiness/Christlikeness:**

Hebrews 12:14 | The author of Hebrews calls us to **"STRIVE for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord."**

II Peter 1:5 | The Apostle Peter tells us to **"MAKE EVERY EFFORT"** to pursue Christlikeness in our heart, home, and life.

Philippians 3:12-15 | The Apostle Paul reminds us of **three** very important things:

1. **The pursuit of growing in holiness/Christlikeness is not the same things as obtaining it in full.**
 - Even the Apostle Paul says *"Not that I have already obtained this or am already made perfect."*
 - Paul himself continued to struggle with sin his whole life. He failed. He fell short.
 - But, the fact that he fell short did not keep him from diligently pursuing the perfection of the saints!
(Notice from the text that "perfection" is the Bible's word for the Christian's goal, not my own word!).
 - And how does Philippians 3:12-15 go on to describe the MANNER of Paul's pursuit of this goal?
2. **The text tells us that despite his failures, struggles, and setbacks, he nevertheless "PRESSED on to make it his own". "Forgetting what lay behind him, he STRAINED FORWARD TOWARD THE GOAL for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."**
3. **Finally, in v15, Paul makes it clear that this kind of thinking and effort toward the perfecting of the saints is part of CHRISTIAN MATURITY.**
 - He says: *"Let those of us who are mature think this way."*
 - In other words, to think any other way is a sign of one's ***spiritual immaturity*** and need for instruction.

Striving, making every effort, pressing on, straining ahead... **these are the kinds of VERBS the Holy Spirit has given to the Church to DEFINE the MANNER in which she is called to pursue holiness.**

Let me give you one more before we move onto to our next question.

I Corinthians 9:24-27 | How does Paul describe the Christian life here? He tells us to “run as if to win”, to “discipline our bodies and keep them under control”.

- First of all, Paul is comfortable comparing the Christian life to a race in which a runner is striving to obtain a prize.
 - The Apostle Paul—champion of the doctrine of justification by faith alone—was **NOT RELUCTANT** to call Christians to exert great effort.
 - Or to use a modern sports phrase, “to leave it all on the field”.
- Secondly, no one wins a race by being **PASSIVE** or by **NEVER PUSHING THEMSELVES BEYOND THEIR COMFORT ZONE**.
 - They win the race by training hard and running hard; by giving it their all.
 - **Beloved, make no mistake, to this we have been called!**
 - Our effort as Christians DOES NOT SAVE US or add to our salvation.
 - We are SAVED BY GRACE ALONE.
 - **But we who have first been so greatly loved by God will long to love God back by a holy life.**

TRANSITION: So, we have seen that the pursuit of holiness is of the UTMOST PRIORITY and is to be pursued with the UTMOST EFFORT. But now we want to ask:

3. To what extent are we to pursue the perfecting of the saints? (i.e. How holy is holy enough?)

The simple answer is this: **The pursuit of holiness is likewise to be pursued to the UTMOST END.**

That is, we are called by God to pursue holiness throughout the whole self and throughout the whole of life at every cost.

I Thessalonians 5:23-24 | There are two things to note from this verse:

1. Comprehensive holiness in body, soul, mind, and life is clearly God’s goal for us.
 - Therefore, it must also be our goal for ourselves.
2. While we are called to strive after this goal, we have in these verses a promise that God will see to it that this goal becomes a reality for every one of his beloved children.

Revelation 2:10 | By these words, Jesus teaches us that **EVEN IF DEATH SHOULD BE THE PRICE REQUIRED** for our faithfulness, it is a price we must be willing to pay as we trust God and strive to honor him.

Transition: The Scriptures teach that we are to pursue continual growth in holiness as our utmost priority, with our utmost effort, and to the utmost extent—throughout the whole self and throughout the whole of life at every cost.

But **BEFORE** we move on to consider the MANNER in which we are called to pursue the ingathering of the elect, let us ask ONE MORE QUESTION about the manner in which we pursue the perfecting of the saints.

4. In what spirit and with what specific actions are we to pursue the perfecting of the saints?

The New Testament is **FULL** to the brim of verses which would apply in answering this question.

But let me simply highlight a handful of passages which focus **NOT** so much on our private or individual pursuit of holiness, **BUT RATHER**, verses which describe how we, as fellow members of a particular local church, are called to strive after faithful devotion to Christ, in community with one another.

I Peter 1:22 | *Love one another with the kind of selfless sacrificial love with which Christ has first loved you.*

But what does that love look like according to the Bible?

How does the Bible define relationships of Christlike love between Christian believers?

Hebrews 10:24 | *Consider how to stir one another up in motivation to live fully devoted to Christ.*

Hebrews 10:25 | *Do not forsake meeting together in public worship every Christian Sabbath, and other suitable times.*

Hebrews 13:17 | *Actually submit to the spiritual leadership of the pastors/elders whom Christ has placed over you for your good.*

James 5:16 | *Be honest with one another about the sins and struggles in your life. Ask for help, receive instruction, and accept accountability. Pray for one another diligently.*

Ephesians 4:15 | *Speak the truth to one another in a spirit of love.*

Philippians 2:3-4 | *Be exceedingly ready to give up your preferences and opinions for the sake of serving one another.*

Hebrews 3:13 | *Exhort one another daily.*

Galatians 6:1 | *Hold one another accountable and go after the one who is straying from Christ in a spirit of gentleness.*

Colossians 3:13 | *Bear with one another's failings and weaknesses, and show forgiveness.*

I Thessalonians 5:14 | *Give to each one the kind of Christian love they need, whether **admonishment**, **encouragement**, or **help**. But be **PATIENT** with them all.*

All of this, as well as many other important things, define the **MANNER** in which we are to pursue the mission of perfecting the saints or growing in holiness/Christlikeness.

As we strive after this **God-given goal** in this **God-given manner**, we will, more and more:

be of great service to one another in the Church, and

also shine like lights into the midst of the darkness of this world,

showing others the way of true and everlasting life that is only found in Christ.

TRANSITION: Now, I am going to say something that might rattle some of you because I know that it is the antithesis of what you have been taught for the majority of your lives.

MOST—not all, but MOST of the work of evangelism takes place naturally and organically when Christians are simply sincerely devoted to striving to grow in holiness/Christlikeness day by day.

Why do I say that? Because when you are becoming *more and more like Christ* in your *heart, home, and life*, **you can't help but speak of Christ with others**, and **resemble Christ while you are with them**, and **prioritize the things of God in how you order your family's life together**, your *conversations*, *priorities*, and *values*.

When you are actively striving to grow in holiness, your whole life becomes a living testimony to the truth of the gospel, to the wisdom of God's Word, and to the preciousness of Jesus Christ.

When you are actively growing in Christlikeness PEOPLE SEE THAT YOU HAVE FOUND A TREASURE IN CHRIST THAT IS WORTH MORE THAN ALL THIS WORLD HAS TO OFFER.

We have all been *trained* to think that **EVANGELISM IS SOME SPECIAL EVENT** that we *plan* and *show up to*.

Of course, evangelistic events *can be very good things* and *I am not saying they are wrong*.

But THE PRIMARY WORK OF EVANGELISM IS NOT AN EVENT WE SHOW UP TO.

It is a LIFESTYLE that we are called to live each and everyday right where God has planted us.

Think about it. *You have been living in a mission field every single day of your life whether you knew it or not.*

Fathers and mothers, there is **a mission field in your living room** each and everyday.

You rub shoulders with **family**, with **friends**, with **co-workers** and **acquaintances** all the time.

You **share meals** with them. *They see **the way you live**.* *They see by **your lifestyle** what really makes you **tick**,* what **matters most to you**, and *what **your life is centered on**.*

They hear the things you talk about (or DON'T talk about).

They see *the way you handle* **problems**, **frustrations**, **stresses**, **setbacks**, and **temptations**.

They are WATCHING you all the time and your life is always COMMUNICATING something.

When we are living generally **WORLDLY** and **UNHOLY** lives, every one of those opportunities is **squandered**.

Instead of pointing people to Christ we point them to ourselves, to the world, to sports, to vacations, to hobbies, to the weather... or whatever other trivial things are presently **controlling** our attitudes, behaviors, priorities, and affections.

But when Christ is being formed in you, everything about **YOU** will naturally begin to more and more reflect **HIM!**

You don't have to travel overseas to do missions.

God does call **some people** to relocate for the sake of the gospel. **But for most of us, we simply need to pursue a truly gospel-centered holy life right where God has placed us.**

We need to have our minds renewed by the gospel so that we realize that we are NOT in the life situation that we are in merely by happenstance.

You are there because you have been chosen, called, and sent on a particular divine mission by your King.

When you begin to grow in your understanding that you are where you are,

doing the things you are doing,

with the people you are doing them with

in order to glorify God in that space,

to bear witness for Christ in that space,

and to seek to advance Christ's kingdom in that space,

suddenly, even the most mundane tasks of life become dignified by eternal and heavenly worth.

Suddenly, you realize that **your job is NOT about making money.**

Your parenting is NOT about helping your kids have a great career someday.

Your goal in life is NOT to obtain as much comfort and leisure as you can afford. No!

Your job is a mission field in which you are called to shine brightly for Christ's glory.

Your parenting is about preaching Christ to your kids through your words and your daily example and helping them be thoroughly disciplined in the truths of our faith so that they will live for God's glory themselves!

And your goal in life is NOT personal comfort and leisure, it is not maintaining good health and acquiring luxurious possessions.

Your goal in life—the very reason you were created by God—**is to be spent to the last penny for the majesty of your Messiah, Jesus Christ**—you exist to shine as brightly for God's glory as you possibly can by living a holy, Christ-exalting life of devotion, obedience, submission, trust, worship, and love.

Yes. I will say it again. MOST—not all, but MOST—of the work of evangelism takes place naturally and organically when Christians are simply sincerely devoted to striving to grow in holiness/Christlikeness day by day.

Nevertheless, the Bible **DOES** give us many good lessons with regard to the manner in which we are to pursue this holy calling of proclaiming Christ among the nations for the salvation of the elect from every tribe and tongue.

The Ingathering of the Elect:

Colossians 4:5-6 | I want to draw our attention to **three separate aspects** of our witness in these verses:

1. **Walking in wisdom means we must be very thoughtful about how to best honor the Lord by our lifestyle.**
 - In other words, our chief concern is not what we want or what we think, want, or desire, but rather how we might best glorify God before the eyes of the watching world.
2. **Making the best use of the time means we have to make judgments of priority based on the Bible/eternity.**
 - We don't devote ourselves to what seems most pleasurable for *today*, or *this week*, or *even this year*, but rather to ***what is most spiritually valuable and important when measured by the reality of eternity.***
3. **Finally, one of the chief ways that we interact with the world is through our speech.**
 - There are ways to speak about Jesus with others that may be true, but can be bullish, rude, and off-putting.
 - The Bible condemns this kind of speech—(*although it also gives examples of very bold speech at proper times*).
 - However, we are to speak of Jesus with others in ways that are **not only true**, but are also **stated in such a way as to demonstrate the holy character of God in how those truths are presented.**

I Corinthians 9:19-23 | Many people have taken these verses out of context. They have used them to justify using (at least some measure of) worldliness to try to appeal to the lost.

- Why? They will say, *"Because I am trying to be all things to all people like the Apostle Paul."*
- But that is **NOT** what Paul meant at all.
 - **Paul did not mean** that he would negotiate the terms of his obedience to God in order to reach more people.
 - **Paul did not mean** that he would pursue a less holy or less devoted life in order to reach more people.
 - **Paul did not mean** that he thought being uncompromisingly holy and Christlike was an obstacle to evangelism.
 - **No! Those ways of thinking of incorrect and very harmful to the Church's witness.**
- **Instead, what Paul meant by his words was this:**
 - **Wherever he could give up his own preferences, surrender his own freedoms and, in some cases, even his own rights, or wherever he could absorb an offense or cruelty given to him by an unbeliever instead of letting it divide him from another person—all this Paul was more than willing to do as an evangelist in the hope of not letting anything unnecessary get in the way of the presentation of the gospel to the lost.**
- **To this we have also been called.**
 - We live in a culture where if someone offends you, we are taught to let them have it.
 - We are told that our rights are king.
 - We are encouraged to treasure our preferences over-against our fellow man.
- **But the gospel calls us to the opposite.**

- In holy love for others—even our enemies—we must be willing to give up our preferences, and, at times, even our rights, and to overlook offenses and mistreatments done to us by others, in order to ensure that we are not guilty of adding any unnecessary offense to the gospel of Jesus Christ.
- This is the manner in which the Church is called to “*shine the light of the knowledge of the glory of God*” into the world.

I Peter 3:15-16 | There are a few key things I want to help us consider from these final verses:

1. **“Have no fear of them” means that, as Christians, we are called to live out our faith very publicly.**
 - Other people can see it, and they might think it is strange or even offensive, and for this reason we need to be reminded not to be afraid of man’s opinions or threats.
2. **We must remember that “Christ is Lord”.**
 - We are living for Christ’s glory and to honor his name, not to be liked and approved of by man.
3. **“To give an answer” means that other people are asking questions.**
 - Again, they are asking questions because we are living out our faith very publicly and the difference between the lifestyle and values of the world and the lifestyle and values of a Christian are so evident and distinct that it makes people take notice and wonder.
4. **When this happens, we are called to be ready to answer or to “make a defense”.**
 - That is, you and I are called to accurately know what the Bible teaches, why it matters, and to be able to intelligibly explain our faith to others when they ask.
 - This means that we ourselves need to know the Bible well, and to have a maturely developed theology so that we can show that our faith is not just empty man-made traditions or ideas, but, in fact, the divine wisdom of God given by the Holy Spirit for the salvation of the world.
5. **And, as we have already noted, we are called give such answers to the world with gentleness and respect that exhibits the holy, loving, and merciful character of our God.**

These are just a few of the ways the Bible describe the MANNER in which the Church is to gather the elect from all nations unto Christ.

You will notice that all of these things are to be lived out in the midst of our ordinary daily lives. They are not events we show up to, but rather a lifestyle to be lived for God’s glory each new day.

Closing: Now, perhaps you may be thinking: “*Yes, of course are called to live holy lives, but aren’t we also called to proclaim a holy message? We don’t just live holy lives, we must proclaim the gospel!*” **Yes! And next week that will be our focus.**

We will consider what MESSAGE God has given to his people **for both the perfecting of the saints and the ingathering of the elect.**

And what we will see is that on both accounts, **the Word of God is the singular tool God has promised to use for the accomplishment of the Church’s mission in this world.**