

# A Hunger for Holiness - Abiding

INTRO: We are approaching the end of our series on holiness. Throughout the series we have seen that holiness is being like Christ. But being like Christ is only possible for people that are IN Christ. That means that they have been united with Christ in his death, they have died to sin, and have been raised to new life with Christ in His resurrection.

Today, I want us to consider the idea that those who are IN Christ need to have as our life goal, growing in fellowship WITH Christ. One thing we often confuse about holiness is that we think it is something to be sought after. And it is. However, holiness is far less a “something” as it is a “Someone.” All the blessings we receive in the Gospel (which for a full description of them, download the messages entitled “A Long Look at Salvation”), election, justification, sanctification, glorification, etc. are all found and applied to us because of Christ. So to seek after holiness means to seek after the Holy One who is transforming us and making us holy. Our UNION with Christ leads to ever-increasing COMMUNION with Christ.

- I. The difference between union and communion
  - A. When you think of it, those two words seem to say the same thing, however there are subtle differences
    1. Union with Christ is the work of the Holy Spirit
      - a) After we have been united, nothing can separate us from the love of God
      - b) Romans 8:38-39 “For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”
      - c) After we have been united with Christ, there is nothing that can make us a little more united with Christ
      - d) And there is nothing that can make us a little less united with Christ
      - e) Our union with Christ is sure and solid
        - (1) Not because we are so wonderful and faithful that the union holds together
        - (2) But because God is so faithful and powerful that the union is so strong
    2. Communion with Christ can be affected by sin and not responding to God’s grace
    3. Perhaps this will help: it is like marriage
      - a) After you are united in marriage, you cannot be more united or less united in marriage

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- (1) In the eyes of the law and the world, you are united as one in marriage
- (2) Sadly, in our day, divorce is far too common and too easy, but you get the idea of being united in marriage
- b) Now, you can have a stronger marriage or a weaker marriage based on the strength of your communion with one another
4. So too, we can have a stronger or a weaker relationship with the One we are united to, Jesus Christ, depending on the strength of our communion with Him
- B. Now, please keep in mind that communion with Christ is founded only upon union with Christ
  1. There are some people that try to say that communion with Christ is the way to union with Him
  2. That is putting the proverbial cart before the horse
    - a) We need to understand first how we are united to Christ by faith in His perfect work
    - b) Then we can understand how to commune with Christ
    - c) It's as easy as this
      - (1) How can you build a relationship with someone you have never met
      - (2) How can you grow in a relationship in which there is no trust
  3. Communion involves reflection, contemplation, and meditation
    - a) But the gospel does not call us to meditate or contemplate, it calls us to repent and believe
    - b) So it is through our faith in the gospel; the person and work of Christ that we have union
    - c) From union with Christ, it is our honor and responsibility to seek communion with Christ
- C. So what is meant by communion with Christ?
  1. Fellowship with Him
  2. Building and deepening our relationship with Him
  3. The deeper our relationship with Him grows, the sweeter it becomes
    - a) We grow in our understanding of Him (not just knowledge)
    - b) We grow in affection for Him
  4. We also experience His love more deeply as well
  5. But the one that concerns us most this morning is that as we deepen our relationship with Christ, we learn submission and obedience - and it becomes a regular part of who we are
- II. I want us to look at the idea of abiding

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- A. There are some people that try to divide the idea of communion with Christ (fellowship and building a relationship), and the idea of obedience
  - 1. Just because we are in a relationship does not mean I have to obey
  - 2. To try to make that division is problematic to say the least
    - a) What you are saying is that just because you are in relationship with Christ, He has no ownership over you
      - (1) That would be a result of not understanding union with Christ
      - (2) As well as not understanding God's holiness, and His sovereignty
    - b) In this scenario, there is no sense of a loving commitment to Christ
      - (1) It allows for you to obey what you like, and ignore what you dislike
      - (2) In which case, Jesus is not your Lord, you are your lord
- B. The Bible does not permit dividing building a relationship (communion) from obedience
  - 1. The two ideas are almost synonymous
- C. Open to John 15
  - 1. This is a very famous passage about the vine and the branches - Let's start with verse 1 (read through verse 5)
  - 2. Jesus tells us we must remain (or abide) in Him
    - a) That only raises the question of how?
    - b) Thankfully, John answers our question in verses 9-11
  - 3. We remain or abide in His love by obedience
    - a) So personal holiness cannot be separated from our union with Christ
    - b) Christ is in us, and we are in Christ
  - 4. A temptation for some can be to make abiding and obeying into some sort of magical order
    - a) i.e. we have to obey before we can abide
    - b) Or we have to abide before we can obey
    - c) The reality is the two are so intertwined that abiding and obeying are synonymous
      - (1) We obey as we abide
      - (2) We abide as we obey
  - 5. If you are frustrated and want to see more fruit in your life, check your abiding (which means also, how well are you obeying)
    - a) He is the vine, we are only branches
    - b) Apart from Christ we can do nothing
  - 6. If you have been lazy about your personal holiness, if you are serious about remaining in Christ's love and experiencing His joy of abundant life, you have to get serious about obedience

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7. John continues this theme in his letters as well - so we are going to walk through some of these
  - a) 1 John 2:6 - we must live as Jesus lived
  - b) 1 John 3:6 - if you are in Christ, you will not keep on sinning (meaning without repentance)
  - c) 1 John 3:15 - if you do not love, you do not have eternal life
  - d) 1 John 3:24 - you keep God's commands, you live in Him and He in you
  - e) 1 John 4:12, 16 - If we love one another God lives in us and we in Him
  - f) These verses are all from the same author, and these verses are all from the same book
    - (1) Do we see a pattern developing?
8. Turn to 1 John 1:9; 2:1
  - a) When we sin, we have an Advocate with the Father
    - (1) He pleads our case and the plea is simple
    - (2) It's covered by the blood of Jesus
  - b) However, just because we have the assurance that our sins are forgiven is no excuse to presume upon God's grace and allow our lives to be marked by apathetic, or worse defiant disobedience to God
9. John uses the word "abide" more than all other NT writers combined
  - a) The reason is he is trying to show us that fellowship with Christ is possible in this life
  - b) But the way we show that or prove that out is through obedience
  - c) When we disregard holiness (hear obedience) we are proving that we are not in fellowship with Christ
  - d) When we are in fellowship with Christ, we will walk as Christ walked, in obedience

## III. Sidebar

- A. Allow me to take a minute to point out a little sidebar of what obedience requires in us
- B. You have heard me say before that humility is a requirement for obedience
- C. One area we have not talked about, but we will be talking about in our next series of messages (which will really be a series of series) is the idea of submission
  1. That is generally a dirty word in our society
    - a) It's as if it reaches back to a by-gone era
  2. But let me tell you the best definition of submission I have found

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- a) "A humble attitude where obedience is rendered within a relationship"
  - b) I love that definition
    - (1) Primary is the concept of obedience
    - (2) But the obedience is not rendered blindly - it is given willingly with the confines of a relationship
  - c) So, I am the Pastor of the church, and I command a particular amount of authority over you all
    - (1) Within this relationship, I have been charged by God, and given the authority to call you back to obedience to His Word
    - (2) I do not have the authority to command things that are not addressed by His Word, or that go completely against His Word
      - (a) That, steps outside the relationship that God set up between us
      - (b) So I cannot command one of the teenagers to go wash my car and seriously expect that it will happen - much less command anything worse
  - d) So submission takes place within relationship
    - (1) The closer and more intimate the relationship, the greater the consideration for submission should be
  - e) So some of the ways in which submission is called for in the Bible include
    - (1) From all people to God - that should be obvious, and that is what this message is all about
    - (2) Jesus submitted to the Father
    - (3) Believers submission to one another
    - (4) Believers submission to Christ
    - (5) Believers submission to the Word of God
    - (6) Believers submission to the elders of the church
    - (7) Wives to husbands
    - (8) Children to parents
    - (9) Young to old
- D. If we do not understand that obedience requires submission (which requires humility) than obedience to Christ, and seeking personal holiness will be a battle all of our lives
- 1. Submission is something we need to learn and understand well
- IV. Now, let's get really practical about the how of pursuing personal holiness and communion with Christ
- A. Our union with Christ gives us the privilege and responsibility to pursue communion with Christ, but how to do it
  - B. The first part of the answer is: do nothing

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1. We do nothing, but God does what He does, to us, with us, and through us
  2. Our feelings fluctuate, and some days we feel more holy and others we feel less holy
  3. The reality is that God is always there, and always at work in us
    - a) He is working to sanctify us even when we do not realize it
    - b) Events and conditions are brought into our lives to make us more like Christ
  4. Too often we want to measure our progress in the short term, but it is the long view that matters here
    - a) Looking at how God has moved and worked over the years
    - b) Much like the little child that keeps measure themselves against the door frame day by day in the hopes of getting taller - it is over the months that he sees progress
- C. The other part of the answer is: do something
1. We cannot roll over and play dead when it comes to communion with Christ
    - a) Yes he is at work in us, even when we cannot see it
    - b) But we also do not want to be in a relationship in which we take Him for granted, and He does all the work
      - (1) We have all experienced friendships similar in nature
      - (2) Where we are always the one calling our friend, and they never call us, we set the plans, and no matter how much they insist they love us and enjoy our relationship, we question it because they put forth zero effort
      - (3) We don't want to be like that with Jesus Christ
    - c) So, I am going to give you four ways in which to improve, increase, and generally grow your communion with Christ
      - (1) These four ways are in no way revolutionary
      - (2) You will not walk out of here thinking, "Our Pastor is a genius!"
        - (a) Good looking, sure
        - (b) But not genius
      - (3) These are basic, simple, unglamorous methods - yet they are "tried and true"
  2. We pursue communion with Christ through prayer
    - a) To tell you that the Bible shows us that we are supposed to pray is practically laughable
      - (1) If you have been a Christian for even the briefest of times you already know that prayer is a part of the Christian life
      - (2) Jesus made prayer a priority

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- (3) He taught His disciples to pray
  - (4) We are told by Paul that we are to “pray without ceasing”
  - (5) We get it - God wants us to pray
  - b) But generally speaking most Christians agree that they feel guilty for not praying more
    - (1) We all know we are supposed to, and many, if not most of us want to
    - (2) But “ought to” is not a good enough motivator
  - c) Largely I think this happens because we view prayer as something we need to do, should do, etc.
    - (1) It is something that we are supposed to do to give God our wish list and then go about our day
    - (2) The problem is, that is not what prayer is
      - (a) Prayer is time spent with our Maker
      - (b) Prayer is time spent with our Savior
      - (c) It is communion with God, not something to check off the list of “to-dos” for the day
  - d) If prayer is viewed solely as a spiritual discipline; one that takes all our will power to muster, it becomes a burden
  - e) The fact is prayer, communion with God, may be difficult on this side of heaven
    - (1) It will take discipline
    - (2) But if we view it as communion with God, it becomes more of a “get to” than a “have to”
3. We pursue communion with Christ through the Word of God
- a) Go back to John 15 for a minute (John 15:7)
    - (1) Jesus just equated His words with Himself
    - (2) His words are to remain in us
  - b) We take hold of Christ more, as His words take hold of us more
  - c) Obedience to Christ involves Jesus teaching being absorbed in our heads and our hearts
  - d) In recent years there has been a push to say the the Bible is not God, and we do not worship it - but what they mean is the Bible is actually less than God’s directives
    - (1) They are right, we do not worship ink and paper
    - (2) We worship the living God - and our desire is communion with Him
    - (3) But if God demands obedience, it might be helpful to know what we are to obey

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- (a) God truly would be mean, cruel and oppressive if He did not reveal what He expected
  - (4) So it would be impossible to commune with Christ without truth about Christ and truth from Christ
  - 4. We pursue communion with God through fellowship with other Christians
    - a) Turn to 1 John 1:3 “We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.”
      - (1) In other words, when we are both in fellowship with Jesus Christ
      - (2) Then we are in fellowship with each other by default
        - (a) We are both united with Christ
        - (b) Which means we are now undeniably in the same family
      - (3) So no matter how odd, frustrating, or difficult the church family can be, fellowship with that body of believers is fellowship with Christ
    - b) I have been in ministry for almost 23 years
      - (1) In that time I have NEVER met someone who is healthier, or more spiritually mature, by being away from the body of Christ
      - (2) However, I have met plenty that were sickly, and immature by being away from fellowship with the body of Christ
      - (3) The weakest Christians are the ones not intimately connected to the body
        - (a) And think on this - the less connected you are, anyone that follows you will be even less connected than you
        - (b) “The man who attempts Christianity without the church shoots himself in the foot, shoots his children in the leg, and his grandchildren in the heart.” - Kevin DeYoung
          - i) It is the pattern - the less connected you are, the next generation will be even more so
          - ii) There are always exceptions to the general rule, but it is still the general rule
  - 5. We pursue communion with Christ through the Lord’s Supper
    - a) We talked about this a couple of months ago - there is a fellowship with Christ (the Bible’s word) in partaking in the Lord’s Supper
    - b) The elements remind us of Him and what He did
    - c) But there is a real spiritual presence of the Lord in the Lord’s supper
- V. Conclusion
- A. Too many of us have lost the marvel of the communion we can have with Christ

# **A Hunger for Holiness - Abiding**

1. If anything we take it for granted
  2. The fact that sinners can have fellowship with a sinless God blows our minds - or it should
- B. So if those last four items of how to have communion leave you with a yawn, I do not apologize at all
1. If you want to commune with Christ you do it on His terms
  2. You do it by the avenues that He has set up
  3. So extraordinary holiness comes through ordinary means