

One Holy Christian Church.

Text: Rom 6:19

Suggested Hymns:

353, 377, 336, 610, 462

- 1) The people to whom Paul wrote
- 2) A life under orders
- 3) A life set apart
- 4) A life filled with positive content

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Romans 6:19, ¹⁹ *I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Today we are continuing our series on the Nicene Creed. Part 14 focuses on the words, *I believe one holy... Christian Church.*

Last week we saw that *the one holy Christian and Apostolic Church* is the Invisible Church and is truly united being one. Today the emphasis is that the church is holy and we are to be holy.

Ask any ten people at random what they are seeking in life, and they will most likely answer, “Happiness.” Ask the same question of ten people in the New Testament, and they would answer, “Holiness.” Does that make any difference?

Is happiness as we use the term today synonymous with holiness of olden times? Is it just a question of words? No. Holiness and happiness are not two equal ways of describing the same thing.

A holy life is something infinitely deeper and higher than a happy life. Holiness embraces happiness but doesn’t stop at that. Holiness means a life set into the pattern of God’s own life.

This is all very much to the point because in the Nicene Creed we confess our faith in “*one holy ... Christian Church.*” Our text is a fitting one to illustrate this statement. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. The People To Whom Paul Wrote

Whom did the apostle have in mind when he wrote these words? They were written to the Christian church in Rome. We have no idea how long the faith had been established in the capital city of the empire, nor do we know exactly who carried the Gospel there.

We are equally at a loss as to the size of the Christian flock of Rome. But in the final chapter of his letter Paul extends affectionate greetings to individuals of the congregation. His manner of expression makes it clear that he knew many of these people personally, although he had never been in Rome before.

We read in Romans 16:3-7, ³ *Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus,* ⁴ *who risked their own necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles.* ⁵ *Likewise greet the church that is in their house. Greet my beloved Epaphroditus, who is the firstfruits of Achaia to Christ.* ⁶ *Greet Mary, who labored much for us.* ⁷ *Greet Andronicus and Junia, my countrymen and my fellow prisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me.*

No fewer than nineteen other people are listed by name in that list of greetings, and the adjectives Paul uses in describing them look like this: “beloved,” “tried and tested,” “hard-working,” “eminent,” and “saintly.”

Under what conditions were these people living their lives, raising their children, earning their livelihood, and carrying out their faith? They were a tiny segment among more than two million people in Rome, all jammed into an area of twelve square miles. One million were free citizens; one million were slaves. Some ten thousand were public officers, and about fifteen thousand soldiers were in the city at all times.

The vast majority of the populace were dirt poor, a cruel contrast to the luxury of the privileged upper classes. Thousands upon thousands of Romans had little more to live for than their daily ration of bread and the cheap excitement of the circus or the gory spectacle of the gladiators in the Colosseum.

In such an atmosphere of boredom mixed with a deep undercurrent of melancholy and restlessness, it is not hard to imagine the multitude of miseries, follies, and evils that promised a deceitful relief from reality at any street corner

of the city. The splendour that was once Rome, the citadel of broad-minded justice, gifted writers and philosophers, skilled architects and craftsmen was well on the decline.

These were the circumstances that surrounded the Christians in Rome, and they were not ideal by any means. This is worth recalling because there are so many immediate parallels to our environment today.

They, like we, were living at the end of an era, when uncertainty and rapid social change brought about the inevitable weakening of moral ideals. Holiness, then as now, stood out like a welcome beacon of light in the darkening world. Ancient Rome is dust and ruins, but the Word of the living God proclaimed once in ancient Rome is as strong and relevant today as it was then.

Let us look at the holy life, then, as St. Paul bears witness to it, viewing this great truth from three perspectives that emerge from our text: a life under orders, a life set apart, and a life filled with positive content.

2. A Life Under Orders

The first earmark of a holy life is that it is lived under orders from our Lord Jesus Christ. This is basic; there is no substitute for Him as the core of the entirely new life. Paul was a man whose life had been utterly revolutionised by the Gospel.

Remember that he had begun his religious life as a Pharisee and as a determined persecutor of Christians. He regarded Christians as blasphemers and a dire threat to all the moral rigour of Judaism. Christians kept on talking about freedom from the Law and a new life in God based, not on personal achievement by keeping the demands of the Law, but by accepting whole-heartedly what God had done for them in Christ and hence empowered them for His purposes on a basis totally different from that of works.

The key to it all was in the meaning of grace. This offended Paul because it struck the very foundation of his life. His way to God was by fulfilling the Law. But the more he lived with this ideal, the more he realised that it hung like an axe over his head.

Instead of leading him to fulfilment in his faith life it led him to despair. For Paul was honest enough with himself to realise that the distance between the

demands of the Law and his own actual performance was so great that he did not stand a chance before God.

And then the breakthrough came to him in the Gospel. Jesus Christ bore in His own body on the cross the ponderous burden of God's wrath and revulsion for sin. In His death and resurrection a plan was revealed from the Father which fulfilled the most ancient promise God had made to man, that He would take the matter of salvation into His own hands, and this He did in Christ.

Here was the revolution, then, that turned Paul's life upside down and set him aflame with passionate devotion and everlasting gratitude for Jesus Christ. The issues at stake were eternal for him. The whole question of whether or not the Creator would accept him was settled by the good news that God's mercy had come to Israel and through Israel to the world, through Jesus Christ who humbled Himself and became obedient unto the death of the cross.

Faith means obedience from the heart. Paul did not embrace a new theory that made all this difference in his life. He lived under a new Master, a new Lord. Now everything hinged on that relationship to Jesus Christ. Sin was still a real enemy to battle, but in Christ the victory was made sure.

Who could question God's plan for life since His love for sinners was demonstrated once and for all at Calvary? Faith in Christ meant obedience to Him. To be sure, there were many who deemed that obedience as total foolishness. His Jewish opponents would have smothered Paul's goal of holiness with the yoke of the Law; to them Paul declared in Galatians 5:1, *'Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.'*

The Gentiles would have wiped out all boundary lines for behaviour altogether and invited Paul to join the multitude in the unbridled life. But to them Paul declared in Romans 6:22, *²² But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life.* In other words we have been set free from sin to become slaves of God, and the result is the life of holiness.

The world jeered at him asking what a handful of Christians were amidst the millions who had never heard their strange teaching. Paul's reply was simply, *"Woe is me if I do not preach the Gospel."¹*

To the suggestion that he was missing out on the great privileges of life by never marrying and raising a family, Paul replied that God had given him a task to do, and equipped him to remain single. It was not a matter of a higher status; it was a question of serving in another phase of the one great calling of the church to the world.

Whatever argument was thrown against Paul, that he was a fool, a madman, a fanatic, there was always one answer, Nothing *shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*²

This is the basis of the holy life. This is why Paul can speak in such absolute imperatives to the Roman Christians. We read in Romans 6:19, *For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness.*

The motive power behind this imperative is the cross. It is Jesus Christ who makes the imperative stick. His Spirit takes the subject of holiness out of the realm of the remote past. He cleanses it of all the stuffiness and self-righteousness we are likely to read into it. He makes holiness not only possible but wonderful.

3. A Life Set Apart

A second way to see the meaning of a holy life is to see it as a life set apart from what Paul speaks of as “moral anarchy.” The root meaning of the Biblical word “holiness” is set apart.

From the beginning God has called out people, set them apart, for the purpose of showing them His will. We read in 2 Corinthians 6:17, ¹⁷ *Therefore “Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. And in Leviticus 19:2, ‘You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.*

This passage is the theme of Israel’s purpose in God’s plan. Out of all the nations of the earth He chose the sons of Abraham. He set them apart from the Gentiles. To them was given the Law, and to them the prophets came with their word of judgment and their promise of the Messiah to come.

There is no avoiding the fact that in the meaning of holiness lies the action of being set apart for a particular purpose under God. Our Lord repeats this theme

in His high-priestly prayer on the night of His betrayal, as we read in John 17:14-18, ¹⁴ *“I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.”* ¹⁵ *“I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one.”* ¹⁶ *“They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.”* ¹⁷ *“Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.”* ¹⁸ *“As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.”*

Here Jesus prays for those who are to bear His name. That means: “Make them holy.” “Set them apart from the world” — in, but not of the world.

This is the reminder to us that the Christian is constantly engaged in what has aptly been labelled *“a lover’s quarrel with the world.”* Any Christian life that is indistinguishable from the worldling’s is no Christian life at all. There must be a contrast, but the point of the contrast is to reflect God’s holy purposes, not one’s pride.

A living faith does set you apart from the world without taking you out of the world. Every day there are a host of opportunities to take your cue from the Lordship of Christ, even though this at times sets you apart from the majority.

It is not easy in most instances, particularly for the young and inexperienced in the faith. There is a great deal of curiosity about things in youthful minds, as well as the impulse to make up their own rules about life. This lays a great burden of responsibility on the home.

Youth, and grown-ups too, for that matter, need the strengthening influence to follow through on their ideals even when the going gets difficult. God counts on you to be His worthy ambassadors, and no greater service can be rendered to the world at large than the training of real Christians who will take up the challenge of a holy life with conviction.

4) A Life Filled with Positive Content

God has made us for holiness. The meaning of that statement is simply this: God has made us for Himself. He is the goal toward whom our lives move, and this is what gives to a life of holiness a very positive content.

Holiness does not mean standing aloof in self-righteousness from the world of need. It means reaching people with the living demonstration of what the

Gospel means and how it gives us something higher and greater to be occupied with rather than lust, greed, and evils of every sort.

Holiness is not always popular. The practice of caring for the brother and being his keeper seldom wins acclaim in the world, particularly when some area of injustice or exploitation is exposed.

The world might pay lip service to saintly believers from time to time, but inwardly the world hates the holy life because the holy life is the conscience of the world inflamed and aroused by the obvious contrast between God's way and the way of Mammon.

You will not be popular by clinging to the plan of God that leads to a life of holiness. Holiness is not a means to any other end except the glory of God and the serving of people in His name.

In the message of reconciliation and renewal through the Gospel, the Christian church carries the most explosive power that ever has come to the world. It is the power that creates holiness, the holiness that causes the devil and all his demonic host to quake in fear. We live by that power in the Christian church, and we have one another to build up and edify by our mutual lives of witness.

The momentous issues of our times are the same underneath as the momentous issues of any time in man's history: how we believe and obey God, how we love and serve one another, how we make sense out of our life story, and finally, how we are taken beyond death to God's eternity.

In meeting these issues it will not be enough to merely seek a happy life. The world waits for something more, and something more is what God provides — a holy life. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ 1 Corinthians 9:16

² Romans 8:35-39