

Series So Far: The Holiness of the Church

In this series of The Holiness of the Church, we have been discovering God's vision for a holy Church. Each study has built upon the last, revealing how God is calling, shaping and preparing His people to reflect His character and fulfil His purposes in the world.

Week 24 – Called Out, Set Apart: The Holy Assembly: God calls a holy people out of darkness and into His Kingdom.

Week 25 – Christ Loves a Holy Bride: Christ loves, cleanses and prepares His Bride.

Week 26 – Built Together as God's Dwelling: God builds believers together into His dwelling place

Week 27 – One Body, Many Members, One Holy Spirit: The Holy Spirit unites every member with a unique place and purpose within Christ's Body.

Week 28 & 29 – Love: The Bond of Perfect Holiness: Love is the visible expression of genuine holiness and the bond that unites God's holy people. God's holiness gives love its purity and God's love gives holiness its beauty.

Throughout this series we have discovered that God is calling a holy people, preparing a holy Bride, building His dwelling place and forming one Body through the work of the Holy Spirit.

This week we continue that theme by exploring how God's holiness and God's love are perfectly united in the person of Jesus Christ and what that means for us as His disciples.

Love: The Bond of Perfect Holiness

When many people hear the word *holiness*, they picture distance, severity or impossible standards. At the same time, love is often defined by our culture as accepting every belief, behaviour and lifestyle without question. Scripture presents a very different picture. Holiness and love are not opposing qualities within God; they are perfectly united in His character and beautifully revealed through Jesus Christ.

Jesus is the perfect example of holy love. Although He was completely without sin, sinners were drawn to Him. Children ran into His arms, the broken found hope in His presence and those rejected by society discovered grace. Jesus never compromised God's truth, yet He never withheld God's love. His holiness exposed sin while His love invited people into forgiveness, healing and transformation.

This is seen beautifully in the account of Zacchaeus. Rather than condemning the tax collector, Jesus chose to enter his home and share a meal with him. That act of grace led Zacchaeus to repentance and a transformed life. Christ's holy love did not overlook sin; it changed the sinner. Throughout His ministry, Jesus consistently demonstrated that genuine holiness is not cold, distant or condemning. It is love expressed through truth, grace and restoration.

The perfect harmony of holiness and love is seen most clearly at the Cross. God's holiness required that sin be judged because He is perfectly just. At the same time, His love desired that sinners be rescued rather than condemned. Through Christ's sacrificial death, justice and mercy met together. God did not abandon His holiness in order to love us, nor did He withhold His love because of His holiness. Instead, both were perfectly satisfied in Jesus Christ.

The Cross reminds us that holiness without love becomes legalism, while love without holiness becomes compromise. Jesus demonstrated that genuine holiness and genuine love are never separated. They are perfectly united in His life, His ministry and ultimately His sacrifice for humanity.

Because of what Christ has done for us, we are called to love as He first loved us. Biblical love is far more than an emotion or a feeling; it is a deliberate decision. The Apostle Paul reminds believers to "put on love" (Colossians 3:14), just as we choose to clothe ourselves each day. We choose patience instead of irritation, forgiveness instead of resentment, kindness instead of harshness and humility instead of pride. Christian love gives because Christ first gave, forgives because Christ first forgave, and serves because Christ first served. Our feelings may change, but Christ-like love remains steadfast because it is grounded in God's unchanging character.

Jesus illustrated this truth in the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant (Matthew 18:21–35). Peter asked Jesus how many times he should forgive someone who sinned against him. Surely forgiving seven times would be generous. Jesus replied, "Not seven times, but seventy-seven times," before telling a story that revealed the heart of God.

A servant owed his master an enormous debt—far more than he could ever repay. Moved with compassion, the master cancelled the debt completely and set him free. Yet almost immediately, that same servant found a fellow servant who owed him a comparatively small amount. Instead of extending the same mercy he had received, he demanded immediate payment and had the man thrown into prison.

When the master heard what had happened, he was deeply grieved. The servant who had received such incredible grace had refused to show that same grace to another. Through this parable, Jesus teaches that those who have been forgiven an immeasurable debt by God are called to freely forgive others. Love is not measured by how we treat those who are easy to love, but by how we respond to those who have hurt us. Forgiveness reflects the mercy we ourselves have received through Christ. Paul brings these truths together in Colossians 3:14:

"And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity."

The Greek word translated "binds together" is *syndesmos*, a word used to describe the ligaments of the human body. Ligaments are rarely noticed until they are damaged, yet they are essential. They connect bones, provide strength and stability, and enable the body to move as one. Without healthy ligaments, even the strongest muscles and healthiest bones cannot function together effectively.

Paul deliberately uses this picture because love performs the same role within the Body of Christ. Compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience and forgiveness are all essential Christian virtues, but without love they become disconnected. Knowledge can become pride. Truth can become harsh. Service can become obligation. Even holiness can become cold and legalistic.

Love is the ligament that holds every Christian virtue together. It gives purpose to our service, grace to our truth, humility to our leadership and compassion to our correction. Love does not replace holiness; rather, it enables holiness to be expressed in a way that reflects the heart of Christ. When love binds together every part of the Body, the Church functions as God intended—united in purpose, growing in maturity and displaying the beauty of Christ to the world.

As followers of Jesus, we are invited to reflect His character in every area of life. Before speaking, responding or making a decision, we can pause and ask two simple questions: Is this holy? Is this loving?

These questions help us avoid two common dangers. Holiness without love becomes legalism. Love without holiness becomes compromise. Jesus never chose between holiness and love—He perfectly embodied both. As we allow the Holy Spirit to shape our hearts, our lives will increasingly reflect the purity of God's holiness and the beauty of His love. In doing so, we become living witnesses to the transforming power of the Gospel.

Love does not replace holiness; it enables holiness to be expressed in a way that reflects the heart of Christ.

Key Takeaways

- Holiness and love are perfectly united in the character of God.
- Jesus is the perfect example of holy love, demonstrating both grace and truth in every relationship.
- True holiness does not push sinners away; it lovingly calls them to repentance and restoration.
- Biblical love is a decision, not an emotion. We choose to love as Christ first loved us.
- Those who have received God's forgiveness are called to freely forgive others.
- Before responding or making a decision, ask yourself: Is this holy? Is this loving?
- Holiness without love becomes legalism, while love without holiness becomes compromise.
- Just as ligaments hold the human body together, love holds the Body of Christ together in unity and maturity.
- Our love for one another is the visible evidence that we belong to Christ (John 13:35).
- The Church is called to be recognised not only for what it believes, but for how it loves.
- Holiness has a face and the face of holiness is love.

Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think our culture often separates love and holiness? How does Jesus challenge this view?
2. Why were sinners drawn to Jesus even though He never compromised God's holiness? What can the Church learn from His example?
3. Read Matthew 18:21–35. What does the parable teach us about the relationship between receiving God's forgiveness and extending forgiveness to others? Why do you think forgiveness can sometimes be so difficult?
4. Why does Paul describe love as the "bond" that holds every virtue together (Colossians 3:14)? What happens when love is missing from a church?
5. Read John 13:34–35. Why do you think Jesus chose love—not knowledge, gifts or ministry—as the defining mark of His disciples? How might this shape the way we relate to one another as a church?
6. How could asking "Is this holy?" and "Is this loving?" change the way we respond to difficult situations as individuals and as a church?

This Week's Challenge

Each day this week, pause before responding to a challenging situation or making an important decision and ask yourself - Is this holy? Is this loving?

Ask the Holy Spirit to help you respond in a way that reflects both the truth and the love of Christ.

Scripture Memory Challenge

**"And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity."
Colossians 3:14 (NIV)**