

The Ongoing Work of the Church

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Now with that said, we're coming to the message this morning. The title of the message is "The Ongoing Work of the Church." The ongoing work of the church. We're doing a series on ecclesiology. We departed from our normal week to week practice of expositional preaching through a book of the Bible and we're doing a topical series, this is the ninth week in this topical series and it is the doctrine of the church is what the series is about, ecclesiology, what does God's word say about the nature and purpose and function of the church. And so we've been looking at that, as I said eight previous Sundays, and we have talked about a key New Testament metaphor to help us understand the nature and purpose of the church that God gives us in the Scripture a number of different places is that we are the temple of God, that the church, that is, the people of God in the called out assembly of believers, are, in fact, God's temple. This is made clear in a number of places, in fact, before we read in Hebrews I'll just mention a few of them. We're going to be reading in Hebrews 12 but Ephesians 2 says "having been built," listen to this picture of the church, "having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God." Talking about the church. He's saying the believers at Ephesus, the believers themselves are the temple, that we are the church, not the building. We are itself spiritually the spiritual building that God is building.

The foundation we saw there is the word of God. Christ is the corner stone, the teaching of the apostles and prophets, that is, the word of God is the foundation. In the last couple of weeks or actually the last three weeks, we were talking about leadership in the church and so I've borrowed on that metaphor of the church as the temple and said, well, if the foundation is the word of God, then the spiritual temple that God is building also has an essential framework and we talked about the leadership of the church. It's like the framing of the temple, and so it needs to have, a church needs to be led by qualified leaders, biblically functioning leaders, elders and deacons, and then that's the framing of the church.

We come today to the ongoing work of the church, or we could say the ongoing construction of the church. We're all called to be about building this temple every day of our lives until Jesus comes back or we go home. And so that's the focus this morning, the ongoing work of the church. The question we're looking to ask today is what are you

called to do? What am I called to do on a daily basis to build the temple? How do we go about that? The temple is an ongoing construction project. In fact, 1 Peter 2, you also have this clear biblical metaphor of the temple where Peter says, "You are being built up into a spiritual house. You are living stones and you are being built into a spiritual house." Are being built, present tense. Ongoing, continuous. It is a house that God is building day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year. God is building his temple. He's building his church and it's going to continue until Jesus comes back. He's going to continue building his temple and we are all called to be a part of that every single day. We're to think like a construction worker that gets up and goes to work to build something. Isn't it wonderful to see people who know how to build things and to use their tools to do that, the skills that come with that. And so we're called to become skillful builders in the body of Christ. You and I all have a job to do in building the church.

Now what precisely is that work we're called to do? I'm using a verse, Hebrews 12:14, which at first glance doesn't seem to speak directly to this and I'm going to show you and you should actually, if I didn't explain this clearly, ask how did he get that, but I'm going to show you where I'm getting this. What I'm basically saying is the work of building the temple, the New Testament in general teaches this, that you work on essentially these two fundamental realities that really define the whole Christian life, and you're to be about these every single day. These two realities are succinctly put together in one verse in Hebrews 12 but I'm going to show you how it's really clearly taught in other places in the New Testament, particularly the book of Ephesians. But what is it that we're to do to build the church? What is the work you're called to do each day when you get up to build God's temple?

Hebrews 12:14,

14 Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord.

You and I are called to pursue two things: peace, unity, oneness, and the NASB says sanctification, and sanctification, the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord. The other translations say holiness. I think the NASB would be better served to say holiness here. We are on a daily basis to seek these two things: peace and holiness. Biblically what peace is and what holiness is, and these are the two things that build up the body. Now all of Scripture has so much to add to this but this is kind of some coat hangers that you can hang some things on to understand the business of the Christian life. The ongoing work of the church is to build the temple by pursuing peace and holiness.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Our Father, we thank You for Your word. As we come to it this morning, we are always aware or in need of grace. Lord, we need Your grace to understand Your word, to truly repent and believe and obey the Scriptures. So we pray that You would lift up Christ to us

and You would make us more like Him and that He would build His church. We pray this in His name. Amen.

The ongoing work of the church. The ongoing work of the church. To see ourselves as builders and to see every day we need to be about the building and the building really can focus in our minds on these two realities: to pursue peace and to pursue holiness. I chose that verse because it succinctly says it and it implies effort. The verb in the verse, pursue, it is an imperative, it's a command, and it is a present tense imperative, it means to go on pursuing, to keep on pursuing. But it's a strong word, it means to follow after, to chase after, to seek with earnestness and diligence, to capture. It pictures someone running after and chasing after someone urgently in a focused and determined way. The word is normally translated in the New Testament persecute. In fact, of the 45 times it's used, 30 times it's translated persecute. Persecution was when Christians were hunted down, chased down, arrested.

So this word pictures focus and intensity. He's saying chase after these two things. Follow after peace. Follow after holiness. This is the work of the Christian life. Peace such a rich and important word. These two words are so important in the teaching of the Bible. Peace means absence of conflict certainly. It means oneness with other Christians. To be at peace means or to seek peace means to labor to be at peace and unity with others. God is saying this is one of the things you have to chase after. It's not going to be easy but you must get up and with a determination to go at it with that kind of focus and intensity to pursue and chase after peace. In fact, the word in the Old Testament informs, should inform our understanding of this word, the Hebrew word shalom. It's such an important word in the Scriptures. It means absence of conflict but it means so much more than that. It means the blessing and wholeness that comes when there is no strife or conflict and it really focuses on that, the absolute blessedness of the estate of peace, not just the fact that there's no conflict but now that there is the fullness of blessing.

And we're to seek the fullness of blessing in the church and the way we do that is we go about it becoming peacemakers. We chase after peace. We work out our problems with other believers. We labor at it. But we don't just do that, we labor at holiness, these two realities. Holiness, another key word in the Bible, one of the most important words in Scripture. It speaks of righteousness. It speaks of moral purity. But the root idea of the word "holy" in the Old Testament is the idea of to be separated from sin and the world unto God. It means to be devoted to the Lord, devoted to worship. So holiness speaks of growing purity, growing righteousness. It speaks of the Christian's responsibility to pursue sanctification, that is, growth in grace and holiness; to become by God's grace more and more free from sin; to put off all the sinful habits and patterns and to put on righteousness through Jesus Christ.

We're to pursue that and as we do, we're building the church, and we're not to think of these things merely atomistically. It's not just that you're supposed to do this in your own life, pursue holiness. No, we're to get up and come to work, as it were, every day with the focus we're going to pursue peace and we're going to pursue holiness in ourselves and each other. We're going to help one another do these things and we know that we need to

be helped by others to do these things ourselves and that's the work. It's like we show up on Sundays, we show up on the job site and we should have our tool belt on.

I was watching a guy, we had some trees taken down at our house yesterday, this man that was up in this tree because there's one tree that's pretty close to the house and he had to take it down in sections, it was unbelievable to watch this guy. He has a rope, you tie it around him. He's got all the tools locked in. I mean, and he's just looping stuff around. He's got a chainsaw hanging in his belt, this massive chainsaw hanging off of some real big hook. And it was just something to watch him. The guy with the right tools and the right skill, wow. Well, we're supposed to be people, become people like that in building the church. Not necessarily chopping things down, building things up.

It says when we come to the body, we come to work. We're not here to rest and relax. We are here to seek the Lord and to worship him and there's rest in that but the rest that is found in Jesus, what does he say? "Come unto Me you who are weary and heavy-laden. I will give you rest." What does he say right after that? "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me for I am gentle and lowly of heart." What an amazing contrast. To rest in Jesus is to take on the yoke of Jesus. You don't put a yoke on when you're about to rest. You put a yoke on when you're about to work. A yoke was what joined two oxen together and the farmer put the yoke on when they were about to go out into the field to work. Jesus says, "If you want to rest, yoke yourself to Me. Be united to Me through My finished work, all that I have done for you can bring nothing. You must come empty-handed to Me. You have no righteousness. You have nothing but sin and filth to commend yourself to God so nothing to commend yourself to God. You come to Me humbly, depending upon Me, but when you come to Me and you receive the free gift of salvation, come to work." Work is rest. So we come to work when we come to the church and when you're at home, you're to be building the temple with other believers there in your home, and the ones that aren't yet believers you're trying to shape them into believers by God's grace, that they'll come to faith, live in such a way that they'll want the Jesus that you have.

But we're to have in particular these two ideas in mind. These are two kind of governing principles. We're to work at peace and oneness in the body of Christ and we're to work at holiness. These two things both must be in focus. Now I said I'm going to show you this in other places. This verse, we're going to come back to this, you can hold your place in Hebrews 12, turn to Ephesians 4 for a minute. Ephesians 4. Ephesians is one of the letters that Paul structures in his characteristic way, he doesn't always do this, but this is kind of a pattern we see in the Apostle Paul is he tends to give all of his doctrine upfront in the first few chapters and then he gives practical application. You see this particularly in Romans and Ephesians are the clearest examples of this. Romans, 11 chapters of the glorious doctrine of salvation, then chapters 12 to 16 are basically how to walk that out. Same thing in Ephesians, the first three chapters glorious doctrine of salvation, all that Christ has done for us, all that God has done for us in Christ, and then chapters 4 to 6 are the practical outworking. It's like chapters 1 to 3 are saying look what God has done for you, and now that you have had that done for you and you're in Christ, chapters 4 to 6, this is what you are to do. These are your work orders.

In chapter 4, verse 1, you see this transition real clearly. Paul has been talking about in the previous chapters in chapter 1 of Ephesians the great blessings that are ours in Christ, verses 3 to 14 of chapter 1, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ," Ephesians 1:3, and he just lists blessing after blessing after blessing. Chapter 2, you were dead but now you've been made alive in Christ. Look at the glorious salvation that Jesus has made known to You. You're saved by grace through faith not of works. God has brought Jew and Gentile together in chapter 2. He's demolished the dividing wall of hostility. He's eradicated the things that separate us. He's made us able to be one. Then chapter 3 he continues on that glorious theme of unity and the mystery of the gospel, that this oneness is so supernaturally profound that even the demons as they look at it are confronted with the wisdom of God. When they see Christians come together who should be divided by culture, should be divided by racial differences or a socioeconomic difference, or any other differences that would, you know, regional differences, the things that would separate people, historical enmities of peoples, when they see Christians come across those barriers and become one, the demons themselves take notice. That's what he's talking about in Ephesians 3:10, "that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places."

So all of this glorious theology summed up there in verses 20 and 21 of chapter 3, "Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen." It would be a great place to end the epistles, you might think but it's not. He's just given you what God has done, now it's up to us to find out what we're to do. Chapter 4, verse 1, "Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called." The first three chapters look at this glorious calling, the next three chapters so this is what you must do in response to this glorious calling. And what he essentially does is in verses 2 to 16 he says, "You must pursue peace." That's the focus of these next 15 verses is unity and peace. Look at verse 2, "with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism."

He speaks of the gifts that we have in Christ and he tells us in verse 11, this is what Christ has given to the church, "He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ," look what he says next in verse 13, "until we all attain to the unity of the faith." It's all about unity, he says. Look, in light of all that God has done, what you must do is pursue unity. You must do everything you can to pursue peace, oneness, harmony.

Down to verse 16 after he says, "speaking the truth in love," verse 16 of chapter 4 of Ephesians, "from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth

of the body for the building up of itself in love." Pursue oneness and build up God's church.

Then what he does in verse 17, so he says, work on peace, pursue peace, just like Hebrews 12:14 said, look at verse 17 of Ephesians 4, "So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart." Do you see that? Look at the Gentiles, you're not to walk like them anymore. You're called to be holy. Verse 19, "and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness. But you did not learn Christ in this way, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him." You are to put off the old self in verse 22, and put on the new self in the likeness of God.

So it's pursue unity, verses 1 to 16, and then chapter 4, verse 17 all the way through chapter 5, verse 14, is talking about putting off sin and putting on holiness. So you see the Christian life, after you see all that God has done, you're to build the spiritual temple, Ephesians 2, he's talking about the spiritual temple. How do you do it? You pursue unity, you pursue peace, and you pursue holiness. In fact, it's interesting he goes right back to unity again in chapter 5, verse 22 through chapter 6, verse 9. You study Ephesians or you're familiar with that passage, you'll remember submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. It's all about unity or peace and it's all about holiness.

So that's how we build the church, pursuing peace and pursuing holiness. This is the work. Now let's think about that. Two points this morning. That was a long introduction. Here's two points. We are to be pursuing peace. You've already got the outline. We're to be pursuing peace. Hebrews 12:14, the verb there, as I said earlier, speaks of intensity and focus. It's chasing after someone. It's chasing after a goal, an objective. The idea is peace is not easy to come by. Now let that sink in. Peace is not easy to come by even in the church of Jesus Christ otherwise he wouldn't have said chase after it. He would have said let go and let God and experience peace. But that's not what he said, he says pursue peace, chase after it. It's going to take focused energy. It's going to be time-consuming. It's going to take great effort. It's going to require sacrifice if you're going to have peace in the body of Christ, if you're going to have relational harmony, if you're going to live in unity with other Christians. It's going to take effort.

So one of the reasons there's so little harmony in the church of Jesus Christ is because Christians are lazy. They're not laboring at peace. You say, "Well, everything's by grace. God is a God of grace." Yes, he is but he's a God who gives grace to those who express faith, dependence upon him, and part of faith is acting in accordance with his word and his word says pursue peace, that is, God works through means. Grace comes to you as you avail yourself of the means of grace. You have to pursue it.

For us to experience the absence of conflict, the cessation of hostilities and the fullness and wholeness that comes from that, we must fight for it, labor for it, and the reality is as a Christian if you belong to Jesus Christ, you're called to go to work today, tomorrow,

Tuesday, and this is your job, pursue peace. Chase after it. Don't be lazy. Don't think I'd rather do anything else but this. It's too hard to make relationships work. It doesn't matter that you think it's too hard or that I think it's too hard. Jesus says pursue peace. I know I feel that way, don't you? Relationships are hard and sometimes we would like to just throw our hands up but the Bible says in Romans 12:18, "so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men." Literally the verb says "be making peace with all men," as far as it depends upon you, be making peace, doing everything you can on your side to make peace. Now you can't make someone else be at peace with you but you can do everything on your side to get peace with them.

Now what does that mean? If you're always responsible to pursue peace, what does that mean? Peace is disrupted by sin. Unity and harmony are disrupted by sin and the Bible makes it clear that when you sin against someone else – listen to this very carefully – when you sin against someone else, you are responsible to make that relationship return to peace. Did you hear that? When you're the guilty party, you're responsible. The Bible says that when you're the innocent party who have been sinned against, you are responsible to make that relationship right. Did you get that? Both parties are responsible. You say, "Well, I tried once or I tried two or three times and I'm done with it." No, you need to be making peace. You need to follow through all the way and when you've done everything that you can, then you can rest in the hand of God.

Matthew 18:15 says, "If your brother sins, go to him. If your brother offends you, you are to go to him to restore peace and oneness." You're to lovingly confront sin and say, "Listen, help me understand what happened here. This is what I think happened and I don't understand why you did this. What was behind that? Let's make this right." And you establish the facts and if he sinned and he confesses it, you forgive him, you graciously forgive him and you restore love and forgiveness. You don't go like a referee trying to point out a foul, you go as someone that's trying to seek peace and oneness with a dear brother or sister. It's love.

So Matthew 18:15 says, "If your brother sins, go to him," that is, your brother's the guilty party but you're supposed to go. Matthew 5 hits the other side of that in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:23 it says, "Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering." This is hard for us to really feel the full weight of that because what it was like to be a Jew in the first century is so different than what we experience now. To make an offering and to take an offering to the Lord, this would have meant a person has committed some sin, this is under the old covenant, they're committed a sin and they want to be right with God, and so they take the prescribed offering according to the Scriptures and they go all the way to Jerusalem from wherever they are. Maybe they live up north where Jesus was raised in Nazareth up in Galilee, and they make the journey of two or three days down to the altar, walk and you're bringing along your offering with you the whole way. They get there and Jesus says and they get to the temple and they're ready to make their offering to the priest to say, "Here's this offering," and the priest is ready to kill the animal but you remember that your brother has something

against you. Jesus says, "Leave your gift with them. Hey, you guys hold onto this, I'll be back in about a week. I've got to go home and make myself right with my brother and then come back and make this offering." Because if we're at peace with God, we're to be at peace with one another.

It's that important to the Lord. He so prizes the unity of his people. You see, this is talking about pursuing it, isn't it? Being willing to sacrifice for it, being willing to labor for it. That's what we're called to do. Then when someone repents, we are to graciously forgive them and to treat them as if it had never happened because you're called as a Christian to forgive others as God has forgiven you. You say, "I forgive but I don't forget." That's not biblical. If you forgive as God has forgiven, you're to forgive in such a way that by God's grace you're trying to separate the sin of your brother as far as the east is from the west because that's how he's forgiven you. And if you're saying, "I forgive but I don't forget," you really haven't forgiven. You need to forgive. You need to repent of your pride because when you put your sin against what Jesus has forgiven you of, it's a very small thing indeed.

So we're to pursue peace, we're to labor at that. This means when we sense something wrong in a relationship, we realize this is work I've got to do. You know how you feel that, you can tell there's something invisible between you and another person and it wasn't there yesterday but it's there today? Maybe it'll be better tomorrow? Are you like that? That's the way I handle most home improvement projects, it'll fix itself. Give it time, it'll fix itself. I haven't yet had anything happen. If you have something, please let me know because I'm looking for some data to support my strategy. No, seriously, that's a foolish strategy, isn't it? Occasionally something like an ice-maker might fix itself but it's so rare that you can't build any strong position on that. Things that are broken need to be addressed, they need to be fixed. When relationships, when there appears to be something wrong in a relationship there's a gracious way to go about it, but you move toward it. "Hey, how are you doing? You seem a little different today, are you okay?" You don't say, "What's wrong!?" You know, you don't just go barreling into the person but you lovingly explore it and you humbly realize that maybe I've done something. Maybe I have sinned against this brother or sister.

But if we're going to build the temple, that's actually building. When you're doing that, you're building and, listen, a lot of times if you're going to build something that's really worth anything, there are going to be parts of it that are really hard, aren't there? I mean, the greatest architectural works weren't something that people could just, you know, buy at Ikea, that doesn't make sense but anyway you know what I'm saying. It didn't come with instructions. It took engineering. It took skill. It took effort. It took trying and fixing and making adjustments. And so it is with the church.

We're to pursue peace but, secondly, the second point is that we're also to be pursuing holiness. At the same time we're pursuing peace, we're to be pursuing holiness. The Christian is called to actively pursue holiness, to chase after, to run swiftly after, to strive to capture more and more holiness, focused intensity, sustained effort to be separated more and more unto God. That's important as we talk about this that we take a moment to

realize something. As a Christian you're not pursuing holiness to be accepted by God. A Christian pursues holiness because he has been accepted by God. You pursue holiness after you have received holiness. You see, when you come to God in salvation, you come acknowledging if you come truly to God for salvation, you come acknowledging that you have nothing to commend yourself to God and you cannot make yourself holy. The words of Jeremiah, "Can the Ethiopian change the color of his skin? Can the leopard change his spots? Neither can you who are wicked do righteousness." We can't change anything about ourselves and we certainly can't change our sinfulness, that's the whole point of that passage. You cannot do it. I cannot do it.

So what happens is we come to God and we find that he has done everything necessary. As we read from Isaiah earlier, the Lord is our salvation. He has done the work. Jesus Christ has come and lived a perfect life. His great work, his great work of obedience is the possession of everyone who believes in him. His great work of obedience. This is a helpful concept to think about, the obedience of Christ. Theologians have divided obedience up into two parts, the obedience of Jesus into two parts: the active obedience and the passive obedience. The active obedience of Jesus speaks to the fact that Jesus actively obeyed and fulfilled every requirement of the law. In his life, every moment was spent in actively obeying every single requirement of the law of God, and he fulfilled them perfectly. Every single one, every single moment of every single day, a perfect record of righteousness. That's his active obedience.

His passive obedience. He fulfills the law in his active obedience and he fulfills the law in his passive obedience. What's his passive obedience? His passive obedience is his submission to the Father to become the sin-bearer in our place, and his passive obedience is him saying yes to the cross. In the garden of Gethsemane when he said, "Father, not My will but Your will be done." And he went to the cross. He bore our sins in his body. Everything that the law said that happens to the sinner happened to Jesus in his passive obedience.

So he's taken all of the law. He has fulfilled the entire law. Every jot and tittle fulfilled in Jesus. In his active obedience, perfect righteousness. In his passive obedience, perfect satisfaction of the justice of God. Again, the righteousness of God vindicated in both aspects of obedience. And then for the believer when you place your faith in Christ, at the moment you believe God declares you righteous on the basis of Jesus' obedience. His passive obedience, his suffering takes your sin out of the way, nails it to the cross. It's never to be associated with you again. Every sin, past, present and future removed from you, and then his perfect record of righteousness imputed to you, credited to your account. God sees you as if you had lived Jesus' perfect life. That's the gospel and the resurrection confirms it.

So if you are in Jesus, then what happened at the moment you were converted was God took your sins out of the way, he gave you a perfect record of righteousness, he received you into his presence, spiritually you are now in some way seated in the heavenly places in Christ, and now but you still live in a fallen world and you still have remaining sin in your members, indwelling sin, remaining sin, and the calling as a believer is to live

consistently more and more with who you really are, not who you were. This is the pursuit of holiness. You're trying to live consistent with who you really are in Christ and sanctification and holiness is still going to be a gift, Jesus has to give you this too. He has to give you the power day by day to walk in holiness but it is a requirement for his people and it's something that true believers at some level that should strike a chord in you, a desire to be holy, and if it doesn't, if you're just thinking, "Well, I've got my fire insurance. I prayed a prayer and I believe I'm saved but I don't have any desire to be holy." You need to examine yourself because Jesus is a Savior from sin. Remember what the angels said to Joseph in Matthew? "You shall call His name Jesus for He will save His people from their sins." He saves us from sin and for all of our sins. He doesn't just save us from the penalty of sin, he saves us from the love of sin and the power of sin.

Now it's a process. It's a day to day process of fighting because remaining sin in you, the old man still loves sin. That's why we have to fight and it is a pursuit, that's why he says pursue holiness, chase after it. In the same way that peace isn't easy to come by, holiness is not easy to come by. If you think it is, you don't understand holiness. You must have learned some kind of legalistic system that you can operate in like the Pharisees had because real holiness is war.

The command is to see it, though, to seek it with all of our hearts, to seek it by God's grace but to chase after it. What does that mean? Here's the means of grace. Now what I want to say is think about this, what I just told you about what happens at salvation, there's a sense in which the Bible speaks of us being made holy in Christ forever at salvation and that is true. That is positional holiness that is the possession of every true believer. As far as God looks at you, he sees you as positionally holy forever but then you have experiential or practical holiness is to be pursued. That's what the author of Hebrews is talking about. That's what the author of Ephesians is talking about when he's explaining that in Ephesians 4. Don't behave like the Gentiles. Put off this old, ugly, sinful behavior. Put off who you were and live in the power of who you are in Christ.

But it is hard and this is one of the things, I think, that's really tough. I think in our age life is so much easier than it ever was in years past. I mean, it is and it isn't. I know that we can make an argument for that. I mean, think about how easy it is to eat, though, how it used to be. I sometimes think about this, like, you know, to have some chicken, a fried chicken, you used to have to go out in the yard and chase, you had to go out and pursue a chicken or lure them to yourself if you're really clever, right? A little corn. Here's your last meal. Then you had to grab the chicken and you had to, I've heard about from my family members talking about wringing chickens' necks. You know, killing the chicken to eat it. Pluck the feathers. Cut up the chicken. Now we can start thinking about cooking the chicken. For you and me, it's did we go to the store and get chicken, or have you had, did you have chicken delivered to your house from the grocery store. "They're late. I can't believe it. I cannot put up with this nonsense." How hard it is to live in the 21st century.

So life is so easy for us in so many ways that we're just not used to hard work like we need to and there are some things that don't come but by hard work. There's no great, truly great athlete that reaches the pinnacle without sustained effort, hard work, labor,

focus, pursuing something of value with everything that they have, and this is the calling of the Christian. The work that you and I are called to do is to be like gold medalists, with that kind of focus to pursue peace and holiness. In fact, I love that Paul uses that same image in 1 Corinthians 9:24-27. He speaks of the kind of focus it takes to pursue holiness. He says in verse 24 of 1 Corinthians 9, "Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified."

Paul says, "Listen, I am still fighting sin." That's what he's saying here. Even though he's trusting in the finished work of Christ and his salvation is secure, he's living with such an intensity to pursue holiness that he's fighting for it. He's like a runner training. He's like a boxer not beating the air but beating his body. That word "discipline my body" means "strike my body, to hit your body with blows." Now he's not speaking literally, he's not talking about some kind of, you know, physical mistreatment of the body. He's saying, "The soul, the inner man, the old man, the sin nature, I am fighting it every day." That's the kind of intensity we need to have.

In Romans 8:13 he says that the way that you pursue holiness, the way that you find holiness is you are to daily be putting to death the deeds of the body by the Spirit, "by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body." You can't do it in your own strength. You have to have the Spirit's power. You have to be looking to Jesus for all that he is and all that he can give. You say, "Lord Jesus, look at the sin in me. Give me Your purity." You look to him but then you go at it with that kind of intensity. What does that look like? It looks like dying. It feels like dying.

Putting to death the deeds of the body, the image of this the New Testament uses is we're crucified with Christ in his crucifixion. Dying daily is learning to continue to reckon on the power of Jesus' death to daily put to death my sinful desires. And this is what we're called to do. This is the work that you're called to do every single day and you and I doing that is making the temple more and more beautiful, more and more glorious. It's making it more and more a place for the fullness of his presence and blessing to dwell.

It's a lifetime's work, it's a work we need each other for. We're not to try to do these things alone. That's why it's pursuing peace and holiness. We need each other and there's something, I tell you, the thing, relationships are the place that sin shows up, aren't they most of the time? We were talking about this the other day with some of the men about how when you get married, you suddenly see how much selfishness is in your life that you didn't realize was there because now you have someone else to be consulting with about every single thing that you do, every moment. It makes us sound like guys are running for the exits not getting married. No, it's the most wonderful thing in the world. It is the most precious gift this side of heaven outside of knowing Christ is to have that kind of oneness with a husband or wife if God gives you the gift of marriage. That's a wonderful thing but even beyond that, relationships in general are this way and the body

of Christ, if you get around people, isn't it funny how the better you get to know someone, the less enamored with them you become. Isn't it funny how people look good from a distance and you get up close to them and you're like, "Wow, they're just like me. I thought they were way up there."

Everyone's a sinner and so if you're going to be in relationships, you're going to be connecting to other sinners and so be prepared for being offended, be prepared to offend others, be prepared to need to forgive, be prepared to need to seek forgiveness and humble yourself. This is what it is in the life of the church and, listen, this is the amazing thing: God is glorified, God has chosen to manifest his glory in this way. Now this is where it's counterintuitive. I would think, "Lord, listen, if You want to show Your glory to a lost world, why wouldn't You just make everybody, poof, holy? Everyone just, you know, humble and loving and one. Poof, just like that?" It would be impressive. People would look at it but that's not the way he's chosen. He's actually chosen to do it in the more glorious way that it's not something that just happens to you and then you go about your life now because you're all fixed. No, he's chosen to do it in such a way that you have to be utterly and absolutely dependent upon him every moment of every day, clinging to Christ every second by the power of the Spirit to make you able to be one with someone else, to make you able to overcome sin. You must cling to God. If the Lord does not build the house, they labor in vain who build it. How can we build this church, how can we pursue holiness, how can we pursue unity? Only by clinging to God on the basis of what Jesus Christ has done.

And when the Lord does that, what he does then is he makes people slowly little by little more holy and more peaceful, more holy and more peaceful, and the world looks at it and says as they're looking at your life and they're seeing it and over time it can't be denied, something is happening that does not happen out there. Can't. Impossible. They can't love. They can't pursue holiness, not really. They only do it for self-improvement. For us, listen, overcoming sin is not self-improvement, please understand that. If you're trying to deal with your sin because your sin makes you feel bad and makes you feel guilty, you're embarrassed by it and that's your only motivation, you're not going to make progress. If you want to pursue victory over sin because you're pursuing holiness, that is you're saying because of what Christ has done for me, I want to overcome this sin so that I am more focused and more centered on him and less blinded by sin that's remaining in me. I'm cleansing my life so that my life is fuller for him, holy, set apart unto worship. There should be a God-ward focus in every fight against sin. You're separating from sin unto God. You're not doing it so that you feel better about yourself. It's not a 12 step method.

The gospel is something much more wonderful than that but the reality is that even though you're positionally already holy, as you become experientially more holy by God's grace, you really are able to experience his presence more and you really are able to be more used by him so that people feel his presence more in you because you have become more holy. And as we do that, the temple gets more and more beautiful and it becomes more and more a place for God's glory to dwell. And when unbelievers come in, they'll see more and more, "Look, there's something happening here. God is among them." That's what God's calling us to do. That's the work that you and I have to do every single

day. Let's enjoy the work. Let's give praise to God for the work. Let's not resent it. It's going to be hard for us this week. There are going to be times you're going to be tempted just like me to resent it, "Oh no, not again." But let's go at it with joy and thankfulness, clinging to Christ knowing that whatever he puts before us he will enable us to do to be faithful to him, and in his time he will bring peace, in his time he will bring holiness.

Let's pray together.

Father, we're so grateful to You for the glory of salvation, the fullness that is ours in Christ. Lord, we come asking You to help us to be people who are really committed to Your agenda. Forgive us for our laziness. Forgive us for our desire to be at ease and rest, comfort, all these things that get in the way. Forgive us for our pride, our vanity, forgive us for our worldliness. Lord, help us to be people who because of what Jesus has done for us and our fullness of our understanding of that, growing more and more, that we are truly people who chase after peace and holiness and we do so for the glory of our Savior who has done everything necessary to make us one with one another and holy and blameless before You. We pray this in His name. Amen.