

The Holy Spirit and Living a Holy Life



SABBATH—FEBRUARY 4

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: 1 Peter 1:14–16; Isaiah 6:3; Hebrews 12:14; 1 Corinthians 6:11; 1 Timothy 1:8; Psalm 15:1, 2.

MEMORY VERSE: “God is the God who gives peace. May he make you holy through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept free from blame. May you be without blame from now until our Lord Jesus Christ comes” (1 Thessalonians 5:23, NIV).

IT IS VERY EASY for our hearts to grow hard against the holiness of God. It is just as easy to forget how much God hates sin and evil.

But holiness is an important theme in the Bible. The pursuit of living a holy life should be a goal for every Christian. We also should wish to be as loving and pure as Jesus.

God's love and His holiness belong together. They cannot be separated. Without God's holiness, His love would just be a feeling. Without His love, God's holiness would seem stern and unfriendly. Together, both God's love and His holiness are the most basic parts of who He is.

So, the Holy Spirit is deeply connected with our pursuit of a holy life. After all, His name is Holy Spirit. And He is called “the Spirit of holiness” (Romans 1:4, NKJV). His name, then, reminds us that God is holy. His name reminds us that it is God's great desire to make sinners holy.

This week we will look closer at what it means to be holy and to live a holy life.

THE HOLINESS OF GOD (1 Peter 1:14–16)

Read 1 Peter 1:14–16. Why is God’s holiness the greatest reason we have for living a holy life? What causes you to live a holy life? What does it mean that God is holy?

Today it is popular to talk about God’s love without mentioning His holiness. It is true that God is love. At the same time, the name of God is connected in the Bible with the idea of holiness more than it is connected with any other idea (Psalm 89:18; Isaiah 40:25; Jeremiah 51:5; Ezekiel 39:7; Revelation 4:8). This is because the word *holiness* describes how pure God’s heart and mind are. God’s holiness shows that He is perfectly good. And it means that He is completely free from evil.

God has power without limits. He has perfect knowledge. And He has the power to be everywhere at once. But suppose He had all that power but was not holy. Then we would be right to be afraid of His power.

His power is holy power. His mercy is holy mercy. His wisdom is holy wisdom. And His love is holy love. So, *holiness* is the word that describes God best. More than any other word, it describes who He is. To say that God is not pure or holy may be worse than even rejecting God Himself. To reject the Living God is the same as saying there is no God. But to say God is not pure or holy is to say He is ugly and hateful.

God’s holiness separates Him from sin. God desires to do and think only what is good, which is what He is. In other words, holiness means having a pure heart and making only good and pure choices. It means being separate from sin. And for us, it means giving God glory.

Isaiah 6:3 and Revelation 4:8 describe God as “Holy, holy, holy.” Bible writers will repeat a word that is important. They repeat the word in order to point our attention to what is said. Jesus also points our attention to important ideas by repeating words. For example, He repeats “truly, truly” (John 5:24; John 6:47, NASB) and “Jerusalem, Jerusalem” (Matthew 23:37). He also repeats a person’s name twice: “Martha, Martha” (Luke 10:41). God’s holiness is the only thing that is repeated three times in a row, and it is about God Himself. Repeating the word *holy* three times in the verses means that this idea of holiness is very important. And God is indeed holy. He is pure and good.

How scared would you be of God if He were not holy and loving? What does your answer tell you about why we should be so thankful that God is as He is?

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE HOLY (Ephesians 5:25–27)

“Come closer to Jesus. Next to Jesus, you will see how sinful you really are. Seeing yourself so clearly is proof that Satan’s lies have lost their power. It is proof that the life-giving power of the Spirit of God is working in your life.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, pages 64, 65.

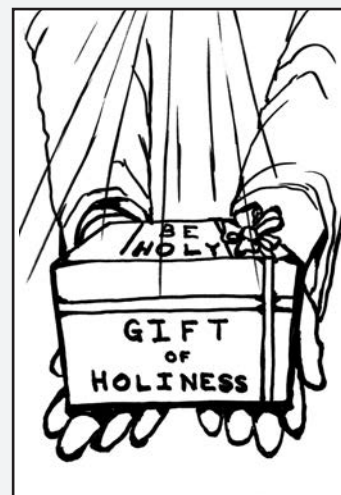
Read Ephesians 1:4; Ephesians 5:25–27; and Hebrews 12:14. In these verses, what is God’s purpose for all His people and for the church?

Holiness is both God’s gift and His command. We should pray for holiness every day. And we should ask God to help us live holy lives each and every day too. After all, holiness is the fruit of the Spirit. And it is shown by our lives. It also is shown when we walk by the Spirit with Christ every day (Galatians 5:16, 22, 25). Holiness, in one word, is *Christlikeness*. It means being like Christ and living the unselfish life He led. It means belonging to Jesus. It is living as His child. It means to love Him and obey Him. And it means growing more and more like Him. In other words, the basic definition of holiness means being set apart for a special purpose for God.

In the New Testament, believers are called holy. Their special relationship to Jesus sets them apart for a special purpose. Being holy does not make the believers perfect and sinless. But it changes them so that they can begin to live a pure and holy life. (Read 1 Corinthians 1:2, where Paul calls the Corinthians “holy people” [NirV] or “saints.” But they are not sinless and perfect.)

In other words, believers are told to pursue holiness. Why? Because without it, no one will see the Lord (Hebrews 12:14). God accepts each believer into His perfect love when he or she comes to Him. But our growth in holiness is a lifelong process. It means choosing to be filled every moment with God’s Spirit. It means living every moment in His presence. Then we will be changed into the likeness of Him who has saved us.

God makes it possible for sinners to be holy. So why must they still pursue holiness or living a holy life? These two ideas seem to be opposite from each other. But we know that we already belong to God. And we know that He accepts us because of Jesus’ death for us on the cross. So how does knowing these two things make our need to live a holy life easier to understand?



Holiness is both God’s gift and God’s command.

THE ONE WHO MAKES US HOLY (1 Corinthians 6:11)

What do 1 Corinthians 6:11; Titus 3:5; and Hebrews 13:12 tell us about sanctification?¹

We become holy by faith (Hebrews 11:6) through the power of the Holy Spirit (2 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Peter 1:2). The apostle (leader; teacher) Paul writes, “But your sins were washed away. You were made holy. You were made right with God. All of this was done in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. It was also done by the Spirit of our God” (1 Corinthians 6:11, NIV). So, Jesus causes us to grow in holiness throughout our whole lives. He causes the fruit of the Spirit to grow within us. He changes us into His likeness. And this change “comes from the Lord, who is the Holy Spirit” (2 Corinthians 3:18, NIV).



Jesus causes the fruit of the Spirit to grow in us.

Read Galatians 5:16, 17. What does Paul tell us in these verses?

There is a battle going on in every believer. The war we all face comes from the fact that sin dwells (lives) in us (Romans 7:20).

Read Hebrews 12:1, 2. In these verses, what is the fight of faith that we are to wage (carry on; make) against sin?

We are called to fight a battle against sin. We can win only if we “keep looking to Jesus. He is the one who started this journey of faith. And he is the one who completes the journey of faith” (Hebrews 12:2, NIV). But too often our religious experience is centered on self. We focus (put our attention) more on our wins and losses than on God. God alone can help us win the battle over sin. This is because the Holy Spirit helps us to look to Jesus. When we look at Jesus, we will have no desire for sin. Then everything that so easily causes us to fall into sin is put aside (Hebrews 12:1). We must not, then, focus on our sins and shortcomings (faults). We must not look at ourselves. We must look to Jesus. Looking at ourselves causes us to be defeated. Looking at our mistakes causes us to get discouraged. But by looking at Jesus, we will be encouraged to live a holy life in His power.

Suppose someone were to ask you, “How do I defeat sin in the way the Bible promises me I can?” What would you answer, and why? Bring your answer to class on Sabbath.

DEFINITIONS

1. sanctification—the act of being made holy. Jesus makes us holy by cleansing us and forgiving our sins and by giving us His Spirit. The more we give ourselves to God, the more He changes us to be like Him. Sanctification is a process that takes place over a lifetime.

THE RULE OF HOLINESS IS GOD’S LAW (Romans 7:12)

We know that God asks us to keep His law. But this fact raises a question. Why should we keep His law if we cannot be saved by it? The answer is found in the idea of holiness.

Read Romans 7:12 and 1 Timothy 1:8. What words does Paul use to describe the law in these verses? How does the law show the character (thoughts; feelings; actions) of God?

The law is holy, fair, and good. Together, these three words can describe only God and His law. So, the law shows us who God is.

To live a Spirit-filled life means that we live by the law of God. The law does not change. God does not change. He is always holy. So is His law. Jesus tells us that He did not come to get rid of the law. Instead, He came to show us that every part of His law must be kept (obeyed) (Matthew 5:17–19). Yet, keeping the law is not about trying to save yourself by your own good works. Keeping the law is an act of faith. The law does not save us. It never can. The law is never our way to salvation. Instead, it is the path of the saved. The law shows us how to live our lives and how to love others. After all, Jesus warns us about what will happen when people turn away from His law: “ ‘Because evil will grow, most people’s love will grow cold’ ” (Matthew 24:12, NIV). In other words, love grows cold when the law is not appreciated.

Read Romans 13:10 and Matthew 22:37–40. In these verses, why is love the fulfillment of the law?

God’s law is the standard, or rule, for holiness. And at the heart of His holiness is love. So, love is our answer to God’s act that saved us. And it is shown by a life of faithful obedience to Him. You cannot be a true disciple of Jesus without being a keeper of the law. It is possible to appear to keep the law and to do so without love. But to show true love, you must keep the law. True love desires to be faithful. Love does not get rid of the law. It fulfills (keeps) it.

Why is the law a description or picture of God’s love for us? How are love and obedience connected?



The law is never our way to salvation. Instead, it is the path of the saved.

PURSUING HOLINESS (Ephesians 4:22–24)

Read Psalm 15:1, 2; Ephesians 4:22–24; and 2 Timothy 2:21. What do these verses tell us about holiness?



When we are too busy to pray, we are too busy to be Christians.

Holiness is what we must have first before we can truly enjoy happiness and fellowship with God. We need to have holiness in order to serve God truly and be useful to Him.

We cannot develop new and better habits and new and better characters on our own. We cannot make ourselves holy. Forming new habits is the way that the Spirit leads us to become holy. Habits, then, are very important in our Christian walk. Habits that help us develop virtues (good behaviors) are deeply important. These virtues include being patient, loving, and faithful. They include being kind and good and gentle and having control of oneself.

What happens when the Holy Spirit fills our hearts? We become workers for God. But too often we do His work and forget that it is God who makes us holy. We forget who will finish the “good work” that He has begun in us (Philippians 1:6). We get busy doing all kinds of things for God. And then we forget to enjoy time with Him in prayer. But being too busy to pray really means we are too busy to be Christians.

Knowledge and success are important. But we must not forget that we can do nothing without Christ and the Holy Spirit. This is because doing great things is not holiness. There will be people who think that they have done great works for the Lord. But they really were not following God at all. Jesus says, “ ‘Many will say to me on that day [of judgment], “Lord! Lord! [Did we not] prophesy [tell the future] in your name? [Did we not] drive out demons in your name? [Did we not] do many miracles in your name?’ ” (Matthew 7:22, 23, NIV). This is to say that there are those who are led by God. And then there are those who are led by self. And there is a big difference between the two.

How do we know God is leading us? Here are two things we need to do that will help us know that He is leading in our lives. First, we must take the time to listen to the call of God. Suppose we do not listen. Then we stand in danger of being led by self to do whatever we want. But our work must come from God. Suppose our work does not. Then there will be no strength, no power, no peace, and no lasting blessing in our work. Second, our greatest need is to spend time with God. And we must listen for His voice. We will receive new strength from the Bible then. And the Holy Spirit will lead us. His leading and our listening to Him will give our work power and will turn others to Him.

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: Read Ellen G. White, “Like Unto Leaven [Yeast],” pages 95–102, in *Christ’s Object Lessons*.

How do we even begin to understand the holiness of God? It is so hard for us to understand it. We are sinful, and God is so perfect. His holiness makes Him who He is. He is not a part of the world of sin and death that we humans experience. And here is the most amazing thing: God offers us the opportunity to take part in His holiness. This opportunity is part of what a covenant² relationship with Him is about. “ ‘Speak to the whole community of Israel. Tell them, “Be holy, because I am holy” ’ ” (Leviticus 19:2, NIV). Or, as the book of Hebrews says, “ ‘The days are coming, announces the Lord. I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel. I will also make it with the people of Judah. . . . This is the covenant I will establish [make] with the people of Israel after that time, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds. I will write them on their hearts. I will be their God. And they will be my people’ ” (Hebrews 8:8, 10, NIV). In these verses, we can see the connection between holiness, covenant, and law. We cannot be holy without obeying God’s law. And we obey His law because the Holy Spirit writes it in our hearts and minds.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① In class, go over your answers to the question at the end of Tuesday’s study. What would you tell those who want to know how to win the battle over sin in their own lives?
- ② What does it mean to have God’s law written in our hearts and minds? Why is this different from having it written only on tablets of stone?
- ③ When you think of God’s holiness, of what do you think? What does Jesus show to us about God’s holiness?
- ④ What is the foundation for our holiness? How do we become holy?
- ⑤ Earlier in the week, we read in Wednesday’s study: “The law does not save us. It never can. The law is never our way to salvation. Instead, it is the path of the saved.” How do these thoughts help us to understand how important the law should be for Christians in whom the Holy Spirit is working?

DEFINITIONS

2. covenant—having to do with the promise or agreement God made with His people. The people agreed to keep God’s law. And God agreed to bless them.