

The Holy Spirit *and* Living a Holy Life



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *1 Pet. 1:14–16; Isa. 6:3; Heb. 12:14; 1 Cor. 6:11; 1 Tim. 1:8; Ps. 15:1, 2.*

Memory Text: “Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (*1 Thessalonians 5:23, NASB*).

It's easy to become insensitive to the holiness of God and not to think much about God's revealed hatred of sin and evil. Holiness, however, is a crucial theme in the Bible. The pursuit of holiness, to become loving and pure like Jesus, should be a priority for every Christian. We are rightly appalled by the “I-am-holier-than-you” attitude. But, at the same time, we can easily forget what it means to live a pure and sanctified life.

God's love and His holiness inseparably belong together. Without God's holiness, His love would be in danger of sentimentalism; without His love, God's holiness would be stern and unapproachable. Both attributes, His love and His holiness, are foundational to His nature.

The Holy Spirit is intricately connected with our pursuit of holiness. After all, His name is *Holy Spirit*, and He is called “the Spirit of holiness” (*Rom. 1:4, NASB*). His name reminds us that God is holy and that it is God's great desire to make sinners into the image of His own holiness.

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

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 11.

The Holiness of God

Read 1 Peter 1:14–16. Why is the ultimate motivation for holiness just the reality of God Himself? What motivates you to live a holy life? What does it mean that God is holy?

It's popular to emphasize God's love while ignoring His holiness. While God is love, the idea of holiness is connected more often with the name of God in the Bible than is any other attribute (*Ps. 89:18, Isa. 40:25, Jer. 51:5, Ezek. 39:7, Rev. 4:8*). Holiness describes the purity and moral perfection of His nature. God's holiness means that He is perfectly good and completely free from evil. God's holiness is the perfection of all His other attributes.

If God possessed omnipotence (infinite power), omniscience (perfect and complete knowledge), and omnipresence (everywhere present) but did not have perfect holiness, He would be a power of whom we would rightly be terrified. Instead, He is the God whom we should love.

His power is holy power. His mercy is holy mercy. His wisdom is holy wisdom, and His love is holy love. In this sense holiness is the most intimately divine word of all because it has to do with the very nature of God. To deny the purity of God's holy being is, perhaps, worse than denying His existence. The latter makes Him nonexistent; the former an unlovely, even detestable god.

God's holiness means that He is separated from sin and entirely devoted to seeking the good that He represents in Himself. In other words, holiness denotes a relational quality, as well as a moral quality. It encompasses separation from sin and complete devotion to God's glory.

In Isaiah 6:3 and Revelation 4:8, God is described as "Holy, holy, holy." When the biblical writers wanted to emphasize something that was important, they repeated the word in order to draw our attention to what was said. Jesus draws our attention to important statements by repeating the words "truly, truly" (*John 5:24, 6:47, etc.*) or "Jerusalem, Jerusalem" (*Matt. 23:37*) or by calling a name like "Martha, Martha" (*Luke 10:41*). Of all His attributes, only God's holiness is mentioned three times in a row. This indicates something of highest importance. God's nature is indeed holy. He is pure and good.

How scared would you be, and rightly so, if our all-powerful God and Creator were not holy and loving? What does your answer tell you about why we should be so thankful that God is as He is?

The Nature of Holiness

“The closer you come to Jesus, the more faulty you will appear in your own eyes; for your vision will be clearer, and your imperfections will be seen in broad and distinct contrast to His perfect nature. This is evidence that Satan’s delusions have lost their power; that the vivifying influence of the Spirit of God is arousing you.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, pp. 64, 65.

Read Ephesians 1:4, 5:25–27, and Hebrews 12:14. What is God’s purpose for all of His people and for the church?

Holiness is both God’s gift and His command. Hence, we should pray for it and seek to manifest it daily. Holiness is the fruit of the Spirit displayed in our lives as we walk by the Spirit with Christ every day (*Gal. 5:16, 22, 25*). Holiness, in one word, is *Christlikeness*. It means belonging to Jesus and living as His child in loving obedience and commitment, being more and more conformed into His likeness. The basic meaning associated with the concept of holiness signifies a state of being separated, being set aside for a special service for God. On the other hand, holiness also signifies an intrinsic moral and spiritual quality; namely, that of being righteous and pure before God. Both aspects need to be kept together.

In the New Testament, believers are called holy because of their unique relationships to Jesus that set them apart for a special purpose. Being holy does not make them ethically perfect and sinless, but it changes them so that they can start to live a pure and holy lifestyle (compare with 1 Corinthians 1:2, where Paul calls the Corinthians holy ones or saints, even though they are not sinless and perfect). Believers are admonished to pursue holiness, without which no one will see the Lord (*Heb. 12:14*). God’s acceptance of each believer is perfect from the beginning; yet, our growth in sanctification is a lifelong process and always needs to be extended further so that we become more and more transformed into the unblemished image of Him who has saved us.

There is a tension between being holy and yet having to pursue holiness. How will our pursuit of holiness be different if we know that we already belong to God and that we are accepted in Him because of the sacrifice of Jesus in our behalf?

The Agent of Sanctification

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

Our sanctification is accomplished by faith (*Heb. 11:6*) through the power of the Holy Spirit (*2 Thess. 2:13, 1 Pet. 1:2*). The apostle Paul writes: “but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God” (*1 Cor. 6:11, NASB*). Jesus produces in us lifelong growth in holiness, bringing forth the fruit of the Spirit within us. Our being changed into His likeness “comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit” (*2 Cor. 3:18, NIV*).

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

There is a battle going on in every believer. The tension we all face stems from the fact that sin dwells in us (*Rom. 7:20*). The apostle Paul knew about this battle when he declared toward the end of his life: “I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (*Phil. 3:13, 14, NASB*).

Read Hebrews 12:1, 2. What is the fight of faith that we are to wage against sin?

The battle we are called to fight is to fix “our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith” (*Heb. 12:2, NASB*). Too often we are self-centered in our religion. We focus too much on our victories and on our defeats rather than on God, who alone can give us victory over sin. When the Holy Spirit helps us to look unto Jesus, we will have no desire for sin, and everything that so easily entangles us will be put aside (*Heb. 12:1*). But when we focus on our sins and shortcomings, we look at ourselves and not to Jesus. This leads to easy defeat because, by beholding our failures, we can get discouraged so easily. However, by beholding Jesus, we will be encouraged and can live victoriously.

If someone were to ask you, “How do I get the victory over sin that is promised to me in the Bible?” what would you answer, and why? Bring your response to class on Sabbath.

The Rule of Holiness Is God's Law

We know that God calls us to keep His law. The question arises, though, 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 attributes does Paul use to describe the law? How does the law reflect the character of God?

The law is holy, righteous, and good. These three attributes properly designate only God Himself. Thus, the law is an expression of God's character.

To live a spirit-filled life means that we live according to the law of God. The law is the unchanging rule of His holiness. The standard that the law sets does not change any more than does God Himself. Jesus affirmed that the law is not abolished, but that every part is to be fulfilled (*Matt. 5:17–19*). To keep the law is not legalism; it is faithfulness. The law does not save us. It never can. The law is never our way to salvation. Rather, it is the path of the saved. The law, so to speak, is the pair of shoes in which our love walks and expresses itself. This is why Jesus could say in a most remarkable manner that when “ ‘lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold’ ” (*Matt. 24:12, ESV*). Love diminishes when the law is not appreciated.

Read Romans 13:10 and Matthew 22:37–40. Why is love the fulfillment of the law?

While the rule and norm for holiness is God's law, the heart of His holiness is love. Love is the response to God's saving acts and is manifested in faithfulness. You cannot be a good disciple of Jesus without being a conscientious and loving law keeper. While it is possible to keep the letter of the law without love, it is not possible to exhibit true love without keeping the law. True love desires to be faithful. Love does not abolish the law. It fulfills it.

Why is the law an expression of God's love for us? How are love and obedience related?

Pursuing Holiness

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

Holiness is the precondition for enjoying the happiness of fellowship with God. It is the precondition for our usefulness to God. We know the truth of the saying: “Sow an action, reap a habit; sow a habit, reap a character.” And, we might add, “Character is destiny.” The only thing we will take with us to heaven will be our characters.

Developing new habits and new characters, however, is not self-sanctification by self-effort. Habit forming is the ordinary way that the Spirit leads us in holiness. Habits are all important in our Christian walk, especially those habits that grow in connection with such biblical virtues as patience, love, faithfulness, kindness, goodness, gentleness, and self-control.

When the Holy Spirit has filled our hearts, we will no doubt be active for God. But too often we forget that it is God who sanctifies us and who will finish the good work that He has begun in us (*Phil. 1:6*). Sometimes we are so busy doing all kinds of things for God that we forget to enjoy time with Him in prayer. When we are too busy to pray, we really are too busy to be Christians.

Perhaps our knowledge and success have made us so self-reliant and self-confident that we take for granted our skills and fine programs and, thus, forget that apart from Christ and without the Holy Spirit we can accomplish nothing.

Activism is not holiness. There will be people who think that they have done great works for the Lord, and yet they really were not following Him at all. “Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ ” (*see Matt. 7:22, 23, NKJV*). There is a big difference between being called by God and being driven to do something for God. If we have not first taken the quiet time to hear the call of God, we stand in danger of being self-driven to do whatever we do. But there will be no strength, no power, no peace, and no lasting blessing associated with our work if it does not spring out of a divine calling. Our greatest need in our personal holiness is quality time with God when we hear His voice and receive new strength from His Word as led by the Holy Spirit. This will give our work distinct credibility and convincing power.

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “Like Unto Leaven,” pp. 95–102, in *Christ’s Object Lessons*.

How do we even begin to grasp the holiness of God when our nature is fallen and corrupt and His is uncompromisingly holy? His holiness defines Him as singular and separated from the world of sin and death that we humans experience. Yet, here is the most amazing thing: God offers us the opportunity to participate in His holiness. That’s part of what a covenant relationship with Him is about. “ ‘Speak to all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say to them: “You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy” ’ ” (*Lev. 19:2, NKJV*). Or, as the book of Hebrews says: “ ‘Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. . . . For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people’ ” (*Heb. 8:8–10, NKJV*). In these texts we can see the connection between holiness, covenant, and law. We cannot be holy apart from obeying God’s law, and we obey His law only as He Himself, the Holy Spirit, writes His law in our hearts and minds. What a sacred privilege is ours: “that we may be partakers of His holiness” (*Heb. 12:10, NKJV*), which we express by loving obedience to His law.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 In class, go over your answers to the question at the end of Tuesday’s study about what you would tell someone who asked how to have the promises of victory over sin realized in their own lives. What would you tell them?
- 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, what do you think of? Go around the class and let each person talk about what he or she envisions God’s holiness to be like. What does Jesus reveal to us about God’s holiness?
- 4 What is the foundation for our holiness? How is holiness achieved?
- 5 Earlier in the week, Wednesday’s study stated: “The law does not save us. It never can. The law is never our way to salvation. Rather, it is the path of the saved.” How does this sentiment help us understand what the role of the law should be for sanctified Christians in whom the Holy Spirit is working?

“Lord, I Can’t Find You. Please Find Me”: Part 2

Greg invited Hannele to visit an Adventist church. She hesitated because she had been disappointed so often, but eventually she agreed to go. She didn’t expect much; but when she arrived at the church, she was overwhelmed by the warmth and friendliness of the people. She was amazed to hear the deep Bible discussion. “These people knew so much about the Bible! I loved the sermon too,” Hannele later recalled. “I returned the following week.”

At first, Hannele struggled with attending church on Saturday until she understood the preciousness of the Sabbath. Several other aspects of the Adventist faith puzzled her as well, but Greg helped her to find answers to her questions, and she continued attending the church.

“I fell in love with Jesus, just as my cousin had done so many years earlier,” said Hannele. “That summer I visited the church’s Bible camp, where I studied the Bible deeply with fellow seekers and came away spiritually refreshed. During breaks, I sat by the lake and prayed for my husband.”

Hannele returned home from camp rejoicing. As usual, she shared her love for God with her husband, but this time she felt compelled to urge him to make a decision for Jesus. She didn’t know it then, but that was their last conversation about religion. Two days later he died in an automobile accident.

“I couldn’t understand why God would take away my husband so soon after I had given my life to the Lord,” she said. “Now I understand that God gave me a church family to support me and pray with me during those difficult days. The Bible texts I had memorized gave me peace, and the Holy Spirit comforted me.”

Hannele went to work for the church’s Bible correspondence school, where she helps others who are struggling with some of the same issues she had. Eventually, Hannele met a good man at church, and the two married. “God has given us a ministry together,” she says.

As for Greg in Australia, he returned to the Lord as well. God surely works in mysterious ways!

In 2010, a portion of your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering provided funds to help build a bigger place of worship for an Adventist group who were meeting in a school in Nummela, Finland. Thank you for your generosity in helping your brothers and sisters around the world through the Thirteenth Sabbath Offering!

For more mission stories from the Trans-European Division, visit www.adventistmission.org/mission-quarterlies or download the Adventist Mission app.

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *1 Peter 1:14–16*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Recognize anew, and more deeply appreciate, the Holy Spirit’s appeal in Scripture for holiness.

Feel: Foster an increasing desire for holiness and godly living.

Do: Resolve by the power of the Holy Spirit to live a life of holiness.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Holiness Is the Essence of Who God Is and the Heart of What It Means to Be a Christian.

A Why is it so popular today to emphasize God’s love while at times ignoring His holiness?

B What difference would it make if God were all-powerful and all-knowing but not holy?

C How does God’s holiness relate to His love? What difference does this relation make in His relationship to us?

II. Feel: The Joy of Pursuing Holiness Through the Power of the Holy Spirit

A Is holiness a destination we achieve or a journey we are on as Christians? Explain.

B Why should the pursuit of holiness—to become loving and pure like Jesus—be the pursuit of every Christian?

III. Do: Determine by the Grace of God to Seek Holiness Through Prayer, the Study of the Word, and Christian Meditation.

A Compare the biblical expressions “walking in the Spirit” and “fighting the good fight of faith.” How are these statements similar, and how can you implement them in your life?

B How can we develop new habits when old habits seem so deeply entrenched?

► **Summary:** The pursuit of holiness is the calling of every Christian. When we seek holiness, we are seeking God Himself, who is holy. It is the Holy Spirit, the divine Helper, who comes to our aid to strengthen us in our pursuit of the holiness that is the very essence of the character of God.

Learning Cycle

►STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: *Ephesians 1:3–6*

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: God chose us before the foundation of the world. In Christ, He blessed us with every spiritual blessing so that we may reflect the grace of His character and seek His holiness. Holiness is not a state of perfection that we struggle to achieve. It is continually becoming more like Jesus, a state achieved daily through the power of the Holy Spirit as we fellowship with God in prayer and through His Word. Holiness is the result of beholding the beauty of Christ’s character.

Just for Teachers: God’s holiness consists largely of two major elements. First, it includes His righteous, pure character that is intrinsically part of His nature. God cannot act contrary to His own nature; so, His actions are always righteous, pure, and just. Second, God’s holiness sets Him apart from all created beings. His love, graciousness, goodness, justice, and compassion are infinite. There is no one else like Him in the entire universe (*Lev. 19:2; Ps. 47:8; 1 Pet. 1:15, 16*).

Meditating upon God’s holiness leads us to reflect His holiness in our own lives (*2 Cor. 3:18*). Ellen G. White states clearly, “It is a law of the mind that it gradually adapts itself to the subjects upon which it is trained to dwell.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 596. The purpose of this week’s lesson is twofold: to help class members to understand the importance of pursuing a life of holiness and to encourage them to develop that holiness in their own lives by beholding God’s holiness in His Word.

Opening Discussion: When you think of God’s holiness, what comes to your mind? If you had to draw a picture of a holy God, how would you draw it? Are the images of a holy God in your mind positive or negative images? Why? What emotions does the thought of God’s holiness evoke in you?

For some people, the thought of a holy God instills reverence and awe. For others, it instills fear and condemnation. There are those who equate God’s holiness with His hatred of sin; and because they know that they have sinned, they are overwhelmed with their own guilt in the light of God’s holiness. In this week’s lesson, we will discover that love is at the very foundation of God’s holiness and that His grace flows from His holiness. A holy God is a just God. His justice is the very basis of a universe free from the ravages of sin.

Questions for Discussion:

❶ Why do you think it is popular to emphasize God’s love but neglect His holiness?

❷ Is God’s holiness a gift or a command, or both? Why?

❸ What is the difference between holiness and perfection?

►STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: There is a tension in the life of each Christian. This tension is between what we are and what we long to be. It is the tension between the real and the ideal. As committed Christians, we long to reflect the image of Jesus in all of our actions, but, at times, we fall far short of our desires. The good news is that we are accepted in Christ, redeemed by Christ, and justified by Christ. We receive salvation through His sacrifice, not by achieving some state of superholiness (*Eph. 1:6, 7; 2:8; Rom. 5:8–10*). In the context of His love and grace, we seek to be like Him. His love motivates us to seek His holiness (*2 Cor. 5:14, 15*). We desire to be like Him because we have been redeemed by His grace (*1 John 3:1, 2*).

Concentrate on this thought throughout this week’s lesson: we seek holiness because we have been redeemed by His grace and long to imitate His character. As Scripture says, “We love Him because He first loved us” (*1 John 4:19, NKJV*).

Bible Commentary**I. Living a Holy Life** (*Review Hebrews 12:2 with the class.*)

In Hebrews 11, God outlines His Hall of Fame of the faithful. Chapter 12 begins with these words: “Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us” (*Heb. 12:1, NKJV*). The metaphor of the “cloud of witnesses” conveys the idea of an athlete competing in an ancient stadium

with thousands of witnesses cheering him on. The apostle Paul here states that the examples of past heroes of faith should encourage us as we race toward the kingdom. Their examples also encourage us to pursue lives of holiness. The “sin which so easily ensnares us” is simply a lack of faith that directs our eyes from Christ’s righteousness and leads us to depend on our own. It is the fatal flaw that focuses on human endeavors rather than on divine grace. It is depending on our weakness rather than on Christ’s strength.

The apostle urges each believer to look to Jesus, the “author and finisher of our faith” (*Heb. 12:2*). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* puts it this way: “To keep the eye of faith fixed upon Jesus is to maintain uninterrupted contact with Him who is the source of power, Him who can strengthen us to endure and to overcome.”—Volume 7, p. 481. The word for “finisher” in Hebrews 12:2 is the Greek word *teleiōtes*, which means the one who completes, perfects, or finishes.

Jesus is both our Savior and Lord. He is the One who died for us and the One who lives for us. He is the One who justifies and sanctifies us. He is the One who began a good work in us and will finish it. Through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Godhead, we “grow in grace, and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (*2 Pet. 3:18*). Through Christ, we who are unholy are accepted as holy and through His grace made holy.

Consider This: In Romans 7:12, the apostle Paul describes the law of God as “holy, righteous and good” (*NIV*). Throughout the Bible, God also is described as holy (*Isa. 6:3*), just (*1 John 1:9*), and good (*Ps. 25:8*). If these are the characteristics of both God and the law, what does this equivalence tell you about the very nature of the law? What relationship does living a Spirit-filled life have with the law of God? Discuss this statement with your class: “You can attempt to keep the law without love, but you cannot truly love without keeping the law.”

►STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: In our feel-good, often self-centered society, the concepts of self-denial, obedience, and holiness may seem unintelligible to most people. Help your class understand that the very essence of the Christian life is that believers, saved by grace and transformed by God’s love, naturally seek holiness. When you admire someone, you strive to be like the one you most admire. Christ’s love wins our hearts, and we long to be like Him in character.

Application Questions:

❶ How can we develop new habits and practices to guide us on our journey to holiness?

❷ What are the things in our lives that distract us from living holy lives?

❸ Why does living a life of holiness seem so challenging at times?

►STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: Pursuing holiness is really pursuing God and desiring to be like Him in character. Help your class understand that the Holy Spirit will produce holiness in the lives of all who spend time seeking God through prayer and His Word.

Activities:

❶ Ask your class to share what new concepts of holiness they discovered in this week's lesson.

❷ Pass out a blank four-by-six-inch index card to each class member. Ask each student to write a prayer for holiness on his or her card in just three or four sentences. (Where supplies are unavailable, ask class members to quietly compose their prayers in their hearts.) Here is one example of a prayer for holiness.

Dear Lord,

Today, I long to be more like You. At times, I feel too rushed to spend time in Your presence. Please forgive me for my busyness. Slow me down long enough to hear Your voice. Change me by Your Holy Spirit, and may I live the life of holiness that You have called me to.

In Jesus' name, amen.