

# The Holy Spirit *and* Living a Holy Life



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## 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?

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It's popular to emphasize God's love while ignoring His holiness. While God is love, the idea of holiness is more often connected 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 had not perfect holiness, He would be a power of whom we would rightly be terrified. Instead, He is a 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?**

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## 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 His people and for the church?

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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 relationship to Jesus that sets them apart for a special purpose. Being holy does not make them ethically perfect and sinless but 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?**

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## The Agent of Sanctification

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

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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?

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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?

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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 so easily get discouraged. 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?**

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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, are the 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?**

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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?**

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## Pursuing Holiness

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

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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 or 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 about 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 they envision 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 with 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!

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