

What Does It Mean To Be Holy?

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[0 : 00] Last week we began our study for the year entitled, Pursuing Holiness in an Unholy World.

! And when we speak of a defining verse of Scripture for our study this year, we are immediately! Because there are some 2,000 verses in the Bible that mention holy or holiness. In fact, we find those verses in the Holy Bible.

Four weeks ago, I was in Oklahoma City with my youngest boy Rob and we were with Steve Lawson. He was putting on a three-day series for us. He was talking about what to say to Jehovah's Witness when they come to your door.

One thing I've said for years, they always start out saying, you can't believe in the Trinity, it's not in the Bible. And I said, are you going to talk to me about the theocratic kingdom? Oh yeah, yeah, well that's not in the Bible either.

[1 : 13] But he said, I've got one better than that. He said, the word Bible's not in the Bible. But we believe in the Bible, right? But it's not in there. One passage though, which really meets the thrust of our study this year, is found in that great and holy book of Hebrews 12, 14.

We mentioned this last time and I will expand on this idea as the course develops over the next several months.

But the very word pursue presents us with an image of work or of effort.

And holiness is not something attained through osmosis. We can't go sit out on a stump and say, I think God's going to make me holy. That's not how it works.

We don't soak it in like rays of the sun. The pursuit of holiness requires diligence and that implies a degree of sweat.

[2 : 25] In other words, we work at it. There is another trait which we hit on last week and we'll mention many times before the study is completed. Pursuing holiness is a lifelong task.

It lasts a lifetime. Charles Spurgeon came face to face with this reality one day in his private study at his church.

He was preparing to work on sermons for the week. I use the plural word sermons because Reverend Spurgeon preached many times a week and in more than one venue.

He thought it best, as was his custom, to begin privately, as he was alone, with a brief word of prayer.

And later he reported in as to the words that came out. It was something like this. I thank you, God, that I'm not like other men. You have given me great ability to discern and then preach your word and even greater ability to preach in a way that common men and even the rabble on the street can understand.

[3 : 41] You have made me a blessing to others. All of a sudden, Spurgeon stopped praying. It's as if his words finally reached his brain and he realized what he'd been saying.

He reported that he thrust himself down out of his chair. He pressed his face into the rug there in his office. He began to weep.

And he prayed that God would grant repentance for the sinful attitude that came out of his mouth that morning. So when we talk in terms of attaining holiness, Spurgeon would later write, In that very moment, I never felt more unholy and more further from the Lord than I did right then.

Spurgeon realized what we too must realize. Pursuing holiness is a lifelong task. And you know what? There will be setbacks.

There will be setbacks. There will be pleas for repentance. And there will be tear-stained carpets in our prayer closet. When I refer to the pursuit of holiness as a lifelong task, we can correctly surmise that it will not be attained in this lifetime.

[5 : 09] If it could be attained in this lifetime, we wouldn't call it the pursuit of holiness. We wouldn't name it that.

Additionally, if it could be attained in this life, it would negate some truths found in Scripture. Two of them that came to mind as I was preparing this are located in the first chapter of John's first epistle. In 1 John 1.8 we read, If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. In 1 John 1.10, If we say we have not sinned, we make God a liar and His word is not in us. Well, clearly, if we've attained holiness, those two verses would no longer apply to us, right? If we say we have no sin, well, if we're holy, we don't have any sin. That's the nature of holiness. But this begs a question, if it can't be attained in this life, why pursue it?

[6 : 20] You're not going to have total victory, so why even pursue it? And there are a lot of answers to that question, but I tend to believe that only one answer is necessary or sufficient.

True believers pursue holiness because God commands us to. You don't need another reason, do you?

You don't need any other reason. I remember being asked one time, why do we witness if God knows who He's going to save? Well, because He told us to. Any other questions?

I said that to some of my Armenian friends at VOM. Guy said, why do you witness if you know God's going to save? I said, because He told me to. You got any other questions? No, He said that pretty much sums it up.

You don't need any other reasons beyond that great truth. God told us to. Striving for holiness is a process. And I will tell you, I'm almost 74.

[7 : 23] There will be exciting victories and crushing defeats. Sometimes all within a day. or an hour of a day. Or an hour of a day. But we will come face to face with this reality.

As we achieve more and more conformity to the will of God in one area of our life, God will then reveal another area that needs shoring up.

That's the nature of the walk we're in. And that is why the Word of God tells us plainly to pursue holiness. Nowhere in the Bible does it say, attain holiness unto perfection.

Wesley thought he could. But even on his deathbed, he said, I couldn't do it. I never succeeded and I couldn't do it. This leads to another truth that I've placed in bold on my paper, which we will hear many times over the course of our study.

pursuing holiness is not unto perfection, but it is to be our direction. That's the direction we're supposed to head.

[8 : 39] And this statement in no way negates the biblical command that we are to live a life of holiness. holiness. It's not a setback.

Holiness is expected, but you almost realize that in the end it is a grace gift from God to His children. Paul gave us great direction when he wrote by inspiration that sin shall not be our master. Sin shall not be our master. So that leads to a very important question that I'm going to answer, I hope, tonight. What does it mean to be holy?

What does it mean to be holy? We can say, I think, with accuracy that to be holy is to be morally blameless. Holiness is described by some writers as God-likeness.

And you have to admit, all of us have to admit, that's a tall order, isn't it? That's a tall order. I had a guy, I was at the Y working out and I was an FBI agent. I actually used to jog, if you can believe that.

[9 : 48] And a guy had a Bible and I struck up a conversation and he told me that, he got to talking and he said, I've achieved moral perfection. I've achieved holiness perfectly.

And within 20 minutes, he was cussing me out. He was so mad at me, I think he lost his salvation. Because I was pointing out some things, you know. Achieving God-likeness is a tall order.

A.W. Pink said this in his book, The Doctrine of Sanctification, holiness consists of that internal change or renovation of our souls whereby our minds, affections, and wills are brought into harmony with God.

That was Pink's definition. An internal change of our souls whereby our minds, affections, and wills are brought into harmony with God.

There is a fundamental concept that the word holiness brings to our minds and to our lives. To be holy, when we apply the biblical standard, means to be separated unto God and our conduct is to evidence that separation.

[11 : 18] We're not part of the world. We're not of the world. We're in the world. But we're not of the world. The very word church, ecclesia, means the called out ones or the separated ones.

The separated ones. God has called... That's Jeremy Jensen. God has called every true believer to a life of holiness.

But what is that to be based upon? Well, the scriptures could not be clearer. Our holiness is to be based upon the fact that we serve and worship a God who is holy.

He set the mark very, very high. In our first lesson, we saw very many passages that verified that. Some Old, some New Testament. The Christian life is one in which we are being steadily conformed to the image of Christ.

[12 : 22] Being recreated in the image of Christ. And there's a word for that. It's called sanctification. That means being made holy. It is being conformed to that image of Christ.

We will not arrive at that in this life, but we are to strive for that in this life. There is a non-biblical description for this.

In fact, sermons are preached in it and books are written where some people talk about cultural holiness. If you see that term, kind of run away from it.

Jerry Bridges mentions this in his book on holiness. He also affirms that it is not in the Bible and not to be our standard. Although many people are teaching it, including churches.

What is cultural holiness? When we come to the point and realize that individually, we cannot achieve holiness in this life on God's standard.

[13 : 25] We look around for someone who is in far better shape than we are or further down the road toward holiness. And even though I have failed at being like Jesus, maybe I can be like those guys.

Well, I can't be. I'm no Jerry Dahl. I'm no James Holt. I'm not near as holy as those guys. But that's cultural holiness. I was going to say Mike Durson, but I went above him.

Way, way, way above Mike. And that leads to a monumental question. We could pursue this well into next year.

What do we mean when we say God is holy? Again, I appeal to Jerry Bridges. Holiness describes both the majesty of God and the purity and moral perfection of His nature.

As an attribute of God, holiness is an essential part of His nature. There is a danger assigning a particular attribute of God as being greater than other attributes of God, higher than other attributes of God.

[14 : 50] For instance, we say that God is love, and He is, but God is also wrath. He's got wrath. Both of those are attributes of God.

Does God automatically have more love than He has more wrath? No. He has absolute love. And He has absolute wrath. And dispenses it when He desires.

But I do say this about God's holiness. While leaving room for the possibility I'm in error, picture in your mind some of the attributes of God and picture them as a spoke on a wheel.

Now, this wheel has a lot of spokes. Picture a wheel up here. A lot of spokes. Let me mention a few of them. There's a lot more.

These are some of the attributes of God. He's infinite, loving, merciful, graceful, wrathful, omnipresent, omniscient, omnipotent, unchanging, self-existent, self-sufficient, wise, just, majestic, sovereign.

[16 : 07] We could go on and on with a lot more. Picture all those as these spokes that holds up this wheel. Without the spokes, you don't have a wheel.

But you also, to have a wheel, have to have something in the middle, in the center. I think we call it a hub. And the spokes go out of the hub into the wheel and everything works harmoniously together.

So we've got to have a hub in the center that the spokes attach themselves to. In my thinking, I named the hub of God's attributes as His holiness. All other attributes attach and are held together by the hub of God's holiness.

It doesn't mean that God has more holiness than love or mercy or those other attributes. He's absolute in all categories.

But everything refers back to His holiness. By that, I mean this. And I won't go through the whole list, although we could. God has a holy love.

[17 : 21] God has a holy mercy. God has a majestic holiness. holiness. Everything that flows from God is holy because God is absolutely holy.

We can attach holiness to all of God's attributes. Even His wrath is a holy wrath. He's got a holy wrath towards sin.

God's holiness can be portrayed in a perfect freedom from all evil.

There's no evil in God. You can't even approach God. Think of that statement in the life of Christ during the incarnation. Jesus was on earth. He was walking around.

He dwelt with us on earth. And He was in the presence of massive sin and sinners. But He Himself was without sin.

[18 : 25] There was not one stain, not one blemish that ever darkened His soul. Nothing. There was no lust.

There was no sideward glance at a provocative woman. No swearing. No thoughts about swearing. He coveted nothing. Every thought and every action were done in absolute holiness.

John wrote about that in 1 John. He said this, God is light. In Him is no darkness at all. That's an amazing passage.

He's light. God's God's holiness. God's holiness. We conjure up an image of a two-sided coin in describing God. One side it says free from moral evil.

[19 : 30] Total freedom from moral evil. And on the other side it is the essence of moral purity. He's absolutely pure.

He's absolutely free of any kind of evil. And we know that God, and by that I mean Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, always conforms to His divine character.

Always. And His character is one of absolute holiness. As believers we too have Christian character, character, but it is a work in progress.

Okay? We have to admit it's a work in progress. And don't ever criticize someone because they're way ahead of you. And also don't ever worry well I'm lagging behind.

We all travel at different speeds on that narrow path. All of us. over time we grow in certain areas but our growth is not consistent even though we would like it to be.

[20 : 43] Like I said last time my life and walk has been two steps forward one step back.

Sometimes two steps forward and three steps back. It's like oh I gotta start over.

We may really do well in the area of truthfulness. and then suddenly we get our backs against the wall and we choose to tell just a small lie.

Just a small one. You know Forrest Gump said mama says it's just a little white lie so it doesn't hurt anyone. If there are any lies we can tell does that not violate the commandment not to bear false witness?

Really? Do we bear false witness? I remember when Don Coleman was in China and the police showed up as a hotel room.

Three of them. They said hey we'd like you to come down the station and talk to us. So they took him they didn't hand come or anything they put him in a car and they drove him to their station. And they were nice they even fed him they sent out for food they ate He ate!

[21 : 53] And they said what are you doing here? And he said later my mind was just what do I say?

How do I answer that question? And aren't you glad we have a Bible? And he remembered Paul testified to the magistrates and he said I knew right then that's what I was going to do.

And he sat there for two or three hours testifying about Christ to these police officers. And he said I'm here to tell people in this country about that.

And they thought about that a while. And then one of them said if you come back would you come by the station and just let us know you're in town? He said yeah I'll do that. He said okay well we'll take you back now.

That was it. And who knows what seed he may have planted. Who knows? if we get involved in any action whether a lie or anything else as believers we can really get dismayed because it is inconsistent with our new character in Christ.

[23 : 05] Remember we're new creatures in Christ. But this is never a problem with God and does not happen. Christ didn't have to battle that. God is always consistent with his holy character.

This is the standard we have been called to and is consistent with God's command to be holy as he is holy. Let us focus a bit longer on God's holiness.

The fact that God is absolutely holy should bring us great comfort. That should be great comfort. Now it is not comforting to those who will face him someday as judge. Far from it. But of us it is or should be of great comfort. God is holy. Therefore his actions toward us is always a display of his perfections and his justice.

Stephen Sharnock was a Puritan clergyman who lived in the 17th century in England. He had this to say about God's holiness. It is less injury to God to deny his being than to deny the purity of it.

[24 : 27] The one makes him no God the other a deformed unlovely and detestable God. He that saith that God is not holy speaks much worse than he that saith there is no God at all.

Boy what a quote from Sharnock. It is a fairly simple matter to praise God during the corporate worship of the church.

We come in we sing along or I mouth words we bow our heads reverently and so forth but you know what about our private times?

Do you ever run into dry spells? You know I just I can't do it today Lord. The well is dry. Praise just won't come at any meaningful level.

So let's consider this for just a moment. When we acknowledge the holiness of God you're praising him. When you acknowledge the holiness of God you're worshiping.

[25 : 42] this is not only true of the believers in Christ whether they're currently in heaven or still on earth. We're just separated from the church in heaven by a little stream of water.

Someday God will remove us and we just hop over that stream and we're there. But it's also true of other intelligent created beings that God has surrounding him in heaven.

We sometimes leave them out don't we? We forget that there are not only saved humans in heaven there are also unfallen angels in heaven. We sometimes tend to forget them.

And we have many examples in scripture of angels praising God. No such praise is richer and more meaningful than what we find in the sixth chapter of Isaiah and in the fourth chapter of the book of Revelation.

Isaiah six, Isaiah is sometimes referred to as the fifth gospel. in the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up.

[26 : 52] And the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim, each had six wings, with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, with two he flew.

And one called to another and said, holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of his glory. There we hear holiness applied to God.

That is praise of the highest order and it is going on in the temple of God right now. And one day we will be witnesses to that, whether we leave this place through death or through the return of Christ, the great snatching away.

And what are these angels doing? They are seraphim. By the way, they are like celestial helicopters. They are flying. They are praising God for His holiness. Well, we have another example.

Revelation. Around the throne, on each side of the throne, are four living creatures full of eyes in front and behind. The first living creature like a lion, the second living creature like an ox, the third living creature with the face of a man, and the fourth living creature like an eagle in flight.

[28 : 14] And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and within, and day and night they never cease to say, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come.

And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to him who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever, the 24 elders, representing Israel and the church, fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever.

They cast their crowns before the throne saying, Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things and by your will they existed and were created.

Wow, what a scene in heaven. And you know, I used to teach thrice holy, holy, holy, and I said, well, that's the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

And then years ago I read a note by John MacArthur and he said, now that doesn't have anything to do with the Trinity. And I was crestfallen and I disagreed with John.

[29 : 29] I didn't tell John and didn't tell anybody else. And I didn't want to bring him to Bartholomew and debate him. But I disagreed with him. Now, in his latest footnotes he says, that's a reference to the Holy Spirit, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

He's changed that over time. What we see in Isaiah, what we see in Revelation, is the worship of the true God.

God is worshipping him for his holiness. They're calling out for his holiness. And it's very interesting. Never in Scripture do we hear words like, God is love, love, love.

We never hear God is mercy, mercy, mercy. But in both Old and New Testament, we hear God is holy, holy, holy.

So holiness is very important. Now, if you find yourself in a dry spell, read those passages.

[30 : 41] Read those passages. That's worship. You're worshipping when you do that. Secure a copy of the Valley of Vision, which is a compendium of Puritan prayers.

I pray those sometimes. I'm not ashamed to do that. I have a book of John MacArthur's prayers. His kids put it together on the anniversary of his 40th year in ministry at Grace Community Church. Amazing prayers. Pray those. Pray those. God will honor that. And the dry spell will end, and the fresh winds and fresh rain will come.

Well, we're going to get in deeper and deeper in the holiness and especially as it pertains to us inwardly.

How are we going to become more holy? We'll save that for next time. Thank you.