

Always Striving. Never Arriving.

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[0 : 00] On September 17, 2018, we initiated a study in here entitled, Salvation God's Way.

2021, that's about 953 days later.

Now, that last figure is a little misleading because we take summers off. What is not misleading is that in those 69 lessons, there were around 180,000 words of Bible study.

And I trust that everyone that attended those, like Mr. Lee, has those all memorized. I don't, but maybe you all do.

But this evening, we're going to embark on our next study. I'm calling it, Pursuing Holiness in an Unholy World.

[1 : 26] I did so because of the pursuit of practical, and by that I mean personal holiness, is or should be the natural outgrowth of a saved life.

When that salvation is accomplished God's way. So you see how I'm connecting the last three years to what will be this year's study on holiness.

We're going to build on our three-year study of salvation God's way. During this study, we will be exploring in depth the holiness of the triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

But at the same time, we're going to be looking in depth at the requirements God has for His children as it pertains to personal holiness.

I want to throw a couple passages of Scripture out at you. 1 Peter 1.16 Be ye holy, for I am holy. In this passage, Peter is actually quoting from the high and holy book of Leviticus in the Old Testament.

[2 : 43] In the 11th chapter, there the Lord says, For I am the Lord your God. Consecrate yourselves, therefore, and be holy, for I am holy.

And then in Leviticus 19.2, the Lord says, Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them, You shall be holy, for I, the Lord your God, am holy.

And then in Leviticus 20.7 Consecrate yourselves, therefore, and be holy, for I am the Lord your God. If we're going to have an operative verse, and we'll probably have a bunch before it's over with, you find a good one in the New Testament from the writer of the book of Hebrews.

As Lee said to me today in a note, whoever that is, Hebrews 12.14, Pursue holiness, for without holiness no one will see the Lord.

Interestingly, the word holy or holiness is not that easy to define. It is one of those words that I'm not sure how to define it, but I know it when I see it, or more accurately, read about it in Scripture.

[4 : 09] Now in Scripture, the word holy appears some 2,000 times. It is found in the Hebrew Old Testament. It is found in the Greek New Testament.

One definition I found, which I believe will serve our purpose as we talk about holiness over the next several months is this. Holiness means to set aside for something special.

You're being set aside for something special. This particular definition applies both to the triune God, who is the perfect example of holiness, and mankind, meaning men and women, who are far from the perfect example of holiness.

By applying that definition, we see God sets Himself apart from His creation, from humanity, and certainly sets Himself apart from pagan gods that are either demons or figments of fallen man's imagination.

Listen to how angels express themselves in the throne room of God. I promise you this is going on right now. And it was going on 2,700 years ago.

[5 : 30] When the prophet Isaiah wrote these words, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts.

The whole earth is full of His glory. Now we're not sure if those words were recited or sung.

Perhaps they exist in a chant like a Gregorian, is that the word? Gregorian? Gregorian monk? Like the monks do? What we do know is that this expression in whatever form it was, was antiphonal. Now what in the world does that mean? Antiphonal singing or reciting. I will use singing because I believe that's what the angels were doing and are doing right now.

It is singing that alternates between two or more choirs or singers. Now, good example of this, and I've said this in here before, you may remember it.

[6 : 40] Remember when you're kids growing up and you're sitting around the campfire and someone decides we're going to sing Row, Row, Row Your Boat. Do they still do that around campfires?

I don't know. And so you start over here with part and they start singing and they get so far and then this group picks up and they get so far and these guys are near the end and they're in the middle and this group picks up.

You get the idea? That's antiphonal singing. That's what these angels are doing. And they're hovering above the throne. They're celestial helicopters.

And they're singing out, crying out to one another because the Lord's right there filling the temple. Filling the temple. And by the way, if you ever wonder who Isaiah saw high and lifted up, in John, I think it's chapter 12, he tells you, Isaiah saw the Lord Jesus Christ high and lifted up.

Just so you know who Isaiah saw. This type of worship also shows up in the book of Revelation. Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty who was and is and is to come.

[7 : 55] Revelation 4.8. You know, I've always believed that the holy there in Revelation and the holy in Isaiah was a reference to the Trinity. The Father's holy, the Son's holy, the Spirit is holy.

Then I heard Dr. MacArthur say, now this has nothing to do with the Trinity. That was 20 years ago. And so I was kind of crushed. I didn't tell, I met John twice. I didn't tell him I disagreed with him. There's not very many times I've disagreed with him.

And the other day he's preaching and he says, now these three holies, that's the Trinity. He bought into my belief and didn't even know that I believed it. This being set apart explains why the Scriptures declare God to be holy.

Listen to Psalm 99.9. Exalt the Lord our God and worship at His holy mountain for the Lord our God is holy.

And then Isaiah 43.15. I am the Lord, your holy one, the creator of Israel, your king. And we know who the king is, don't we?

[9 : 05] That's Jesus. Interestingly, the church in the New Testament is spelled Ekklesia and that's with an E-C-C-L-E-S-I-A or it can be E-K-K-L-E-S-I-A.

It comes from two words brought together. Ekk means out and kaleo means to call. So they're called out ones. They're being called out. Put together, the word church means the called out ones or the set apart ones.

That's who we are. That's who we are. The Ekklesia, church in English, in the New Testament is a group of people who have been called out of the world and called unto God.

That's what the church is. That's what the church is. Now we're getting well ahead of ourselves and tonight's just a brief lesson because I knew we were all going to be tired from eating and cleaning up.

We ate, staying cleaned up. I mean, you know. I don't want to get too far ahead. I want to go back to our lesson last spring when we finished our previous study and I used that opportunity, I used an analogy of a farmer to introduce you what we're going to be doing this year.

[10 : 40] Now I live on a farm but I've never claimed to be a farmer. Never. Some of you won't remember that analogy and repetition is the best teacher.

And also I know that some of you are not here for that lesson on April 26, 2021. When a farmer wants to plant a crop he has to do several things.

he must cultivate the land. Typically that involves plowing the field. He then sows the seed of the crop that he hopes to raise.

He also at some point will typically add fertilizer in an effort to raise the best possible crop, get maximum yield. But in the back of the farmer's mind he knows something.

He is also totally dependent upon a force that is outside of himself. If the farmer is really smart and spiritual and if he's smart he'll be spiritual, he knows that force is God.

[12 : 02] He knows God is involved in farming. So what is God's role in bringing in a crop? Well one thing, God causes a seed to germinate.

That's nothing short of a miracle. That's resurrection. I mean that seed, put it in dirt, starts to grow. It cracks open. Stuff, sprouts come out.

So God causes the seed to germinate. If the man tries to take a hammer and tap the seeds, they'll die. But put them in soil and they germinate.

They shoot out pieces of the shell and the seed after lying dormant. A seed can actually sit on a shelf for years and nothing happens.

Put it in dirt and it comes to active life from dormancy. It begins to grow. Several years ago I remember hearing archaeologists found clay jars containing wheat seeds in the pyramids in Egypt.

[13 : 13] And I've seen those. I've been there and seen them. They're mighty old. Mighty old. They took some of those seeds and planted them in good soil and they grew.

They estimated those seeds were 4,000 years old. They'd been sitting in the dark of the pyramids for millennia and they planted them and they sprouted wheat.

What else does God do? He sends rain. You've got to have rain. Lord, we need rain. I think we had some in the forecast for Wednesday. I think it's now gone.

Last I checked. God sends rain. He sends sunshine. Without these two essentials the crop will fail. There's another essential element needed for the adequate growth of plants for human consumption.

That's nitrogen. nitrogen. Got to have nitrogen. Our atmosphere is made up of something like 78% nitrogen. Nitrogen is essential to maintaining human life.

[14 : 28] But the form nitrogen takes in the atmosphere can't be consumed by humans in food. We can't do that. It actually takes an act of violence to free up the atomic structure of nitrogen in useful form.

And that violent act is lightning. You've got to have lightning. After a lightning strike which I had a few weeks ago it hit my house and my leg. We were sitting there and Diane said I think we just got hit by lightning.

I said I think I just got hit by lightning. But after a lightning strike or even lightning in the sky the nitrogen is changed molecularly into a useful consumable form.

And it falls to the earth goes into the plants and we ingest it. I don't know how Darwin came up with that when he invented creation but he's amazing isn't he?

That's something only God can do. Only God can do that. So farming then is a joint venture between God and the farmer.

[15 : 44] And really smart farmers understand that and reverence him. This describes holiness.

This describes holy living. in pursuing holiness we cannot do what God must do and God will not do what we must do.

To live a life of obedience we are commanded to pursue holiness and the operative word used in that sentence is pursue. That's the most important word in that sentence pursue.

Pursue is an important concept because it implies two things. First that diligence and effort are required.

We got to work at this. We got to pursue it. Second that pursuing holiness is a lifelong task. You don't wake up some more and say well okay I've accomplished that let me move on to something else.

[16 : 58] No. This is a lifelong task. On the second point you will hear me many times repeating a phrase we might as well call it the motto of our study this year.

When we speak of pursuing personal holiness it will not in this life be unto perfection but it should constantly be our direction not perfection direction it's the direction we're traveling that's why we use the word pursue we work at it with diligence and effort our entire Christian life holiness then is a process and it is possible that we may experience success in one area of our walk with the Lord and if that happens then we praise God and we thank him but when that happens God will then reveal to us another area of our life we call that our walk of faith that needs help needs shoring up that's the nature of the

Christian walk always striving never arriving I like that too for a motto always striving never arriving in this life Charles Purkin experienced this in his own life he said he discovered he had cracks and crevices in his own life and he would spend hours in his prayer closet on his face and confessing

them to God and he said every now and then victory came but with victory God gave him additional light and what did that do it revealed more and different crevices so he dealt with the crevices victory came in and now all of a sudden he's got more crevices to deal with they had to be dealt with and when they were dealt with they brought more light and that revealed more crevices that he didn't realize he'd have this was the cycle of

Spurgeon's life in his lifetime he said this was the cycle and it's the same cycle all believers should experience we should all experience this and by the way guys if we're going to be holy we're going to have to get a prayer closet there's going to be a closet by the way but we're going to have to set some time aside with the Lord it can be said we're always pursuing but never attaining perfect holiness in life will it ever be attained?

absolutely absolutely it will be attained! God even wrote a passage to us about it 1 John 3 verses 2 and 3 beloved we are God's children now you like that?

[20 : 30] we're God's children now and what we will be has not yet appeared but we know that when he appears we shall be like him because we shall see him as he is and everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure one day we're going to see Jesus and be like him that's an amazing concept talking to Mike just a few minutes ago about some of the more extreme charlatan guys that have been claiming the last few years took a trip up to heaven one in particular and I don't like to mention names but Jesse Duplantis he got up there he told his congregation he said I went up there and Jesus was crying standing over in the corner crying I walked up I said Lord what's my matter?

he said I failed what do you mean you failed? look at all the people going to hell he said you haven't failed we got everything under control down there dry your eyes we're in charge well they came back and told everybody on TV you know I've been to heaven and everybody ood and ood and ood and started sending him money let me tell you something Jesse hadn't seen the Lord I promise you your life will never be the same if you ever do even the greats when they were on earth they were shielded I mean Moses you know he wanted to see the Lord so the Lord let him look briefly at his backside hit him behind a boulder Peter, James and John went up on the Mount of Transfiguration and to spare their lives God put them in a coma and knocked them out the only time anybody ever looked into the face of God a holy God was when Jesus Christ was incarnated and walked on earth and it was veiled in human flesh so they would not see his full glory and I always think of Bethel Church in California I don't recommend you watch them but when they had remember some of you saw the video of the gold and the silver tinsel coming out of the air conditioned system and they said that was the glory of God coming down from heaven and I love what Dr. MacArthur commented about he said if that had been God's glory everybody in that building would have been dead everybody would have been dead can't look on God's glory and live I teach because I discovered 42 years ago it was the best way for me to learn that's why I'm up here it's how I learn my learning though is dependent upon others I depend on other people this is especially true of inspired scripture I depend on that which is the word of God but I've also benefited greatly from other men whose level of holiness and of grasping holiness is far superior to mine when we get to the conclusion of this divine topic the study will largely be theirs and not mine now who are some of these guys first of all

I'm indebted to the Puritans and if you can read the Puritans guy they they they knew what it was all about they are neat neat guys they had a unique understanding of the holiness of God and they understood his command for us to be holy they understood that I am particularly fond of Dr. John Owens I read a lot of his stuff but I have to read the abridged version because I'm not smart enough to read the precise words he wrote down kind of in the old English I think Evan you told me one time you like Owen or the Puritans but I found some abridged copies which make more sense to me I'm additionally indebted to Bishop J.C.

Ryle Dr. J.I. Packer Dr. David Martin Lowe Jones and I like to call him doctor because he was a physician and the late now Reverend Jerry Bridges Jerry Bridges was at Navigators for years and years and years he wrote dozens of books and all that money went to Navigators neat guy I so enjoyed some of his books recently that I decided to sit down and write him a letter and I got online and he died in 2016 I didn't write him that was just a couple months ago I'll be quoting these guys sometimes I'll give them credit and sometimes I'll take the credit but I'll be quoting them and additionally I'm sure that none of you will be surprised if you hear a quote or two from Dr.

[25 : 38] MacArthur or Dr. Sproul ironically everybody on that list is dead now except Dr. MacArthur and I hope I didn't jinx it we need him around I don't know all there is to know about personal holiness and I don't know all there is to know about God's holiness I don't my Christian walk all these years and I was I was saved kind of late I was in my early thirties I was an FBI agent thin had hair was suspicious that was my job to be suspicious the Lord saved me but my Christian walk as I look back on it has really been two steps forward and one step back and sometimes it's been two steps forward and three steps back that's that's been my life I confess it

I have spent much time in the valley and a little time on the mountaintop but you know I learned something when you're in the valley you can see the mountaintop clearly and you can see the Lord high and lift it up well all that being said and knowing we were going to have a long night tonight I'm going to close our brief study this evening with a quote from the inspired words of Isaiah the prophet to Israel we've already read part of this it concerns his encounter with the holy God of the universe recorded in Isaiah chapter six you'll remember that because it begins in the year that King Uzziah died I love what John MacArthur said the other day you know he said is that important to know the year that King

Uzziah died he says well it was important to Uzziah and it was important to Mrs. Uzziah and the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting up on a throne high and lifted up and the train of his robe filled the temple above him stood the seraphim we talked about them 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 holy is the Lord of hosts the whole earth is full of his glory and I love this and the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called and the house was filled with smoke and I said woe is me for I am lost for I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips for my eyes have seen the king the lord of hosts

Isaiah saw the holiness of God at least in part and he immediately pronounced a curse upon himself because he wasn't worthy to see what he saw and he would have been considered the holiest man in the nation of Israel no doubt but he said woe that's a personal curse and during our course of study we will be coming back to that portion of scripture and I'm sure quite frequently