

Introduction and Purpose of Study

I desire us to start a discussion on Holiness. At its core to be “Holy” means to be pure and devoted, separated from the world and set aside entirely to God. This position of holiness is mandated by God, it is not optional for believers; without it, no one can see or please God. It is also the highest honor and blessing for it provides absolute intimacy and union with God. **We read:**

“Strive for... holiness without which no one will see the Lord.” (Hebrews 12:14)

“As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”” (1 Peter 1:14–16)

“I will make my dwelling among you, and my soul shall not abhor you. And I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be my people.” (Leviticus 26:11–12)

All genuine followers of Jesus Christ desire holiness and many of us heartily pursue it; yet, most Christians will admit they are frustrated in the day-to-day “quest to be holy”. We chase God’s will yet somehow feel we do not know what true holiness is and why its pursuit is so difficult that we often want to give up.

It is even harder to apply God’s mandate of holiness when we lack instructions specific to the individual. When a person hears the call of holiness, yet lacks a day-to-day application, he/she can get very frustrated and quit pursuing anything. I’ve met many Christians who gave up and exist somewhere on the trail, between two kingdoms, unsure of their fate.

If you have been saved for a moderate amount of time, I imagine you would agree with the following thoughts: *“Holiness seems like a hidden pathway we are only told about, but do not know how to actually find and ‘walk therein’. Following Jesus without knowing the destination is incredibly challenging. At best we stumble towards godly morality and righteous actions. We are not sure we attain either, we are not so sure we are ‘holy’ and we are equally confused by what to do about it... I admit, ‘sometimes I just want to quit’”.*

Does this sound like you? Spend some time to ask yourself the following questions. It might help to write your answers out on paper. For now, do not use a Bible dictionary. Ask yourself, what do you currently believe:

1. What is holiness?
2. Who is holy?
3. Am I holy?
4. Can I be more holy?
5. Do I struggle in day-to-day faith?
6. Is my faith more exciting or more frustrating?
7. Do I live with a destination in mind, other than just making it to heaven?

Set your answers aside. We will revisit them later.

Lesson 1: Finding the path

We read: *“Thus says the Lord: “Stand by the roads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls. (Jeremiah 6:16)*

Background: Wouldn't it be nice if there was a road we could see or a GPS directing each turn to the ancient pathway of holiness? Imagine seeing a sign pointing to **Interstate H: Highway of the Heavens**. I am sure we'd all love to see where this highway is. Just imagine how spectacular it would be to look out your window today and physically see the road God wants you to travel. Yeah... *that would be nice*. Good luck!

Sadly, you cannot find the heavenly highway on an earthly map. In reality it can only be found by following Jesus and yet it sounds so cliché to say, “We follow Jesus” while struggling for the direction of our Christian walk. Doesn't it?

Reality: Often, we cannot see where Jesus is, where He is going, how to follow him or who we are to be in pursuit of him. Sometimes, it just stinks to be a Jesus follower. We want to be holy like Jesus. We think we know what it looks like but just cannot seem to find the path. It is as if this faith “thing” only works for super-Christians and we discover we are in the lesser category or perhaps *the loser category*. Let me reassure you, as a 25-year follower of Christ, and a pastor, I often feel the same way.

When we do not see Jesus, it feels like we wander around trying to find where Jesus went, where He wants us to be, and what He wants us to do during *his absence*. This feeling is exasperating because we live in a world filled with very present and tasty temptations. We try to avoid them the best we can while sitting in the world's candy-shop, bored out of our minds, waiting for Jesus to show up. We silently scream, “Hello, Jesus. Where are you?” Silence... Hum... O look, there's a tasty treat. Should I? Shouldn't I? O, who cares!

Be honest, you feel this way too!

Fact: *We struggle the most when we do not understand the definition, destination, obstacles, and rewards of Holiness.* We exist day-to-day as if we are supposed to be living for heaven, but we do not know how, and are stuck trying to navigate this filthy place.

Today, it is my desire to explore holiness with you, to prepare us for the challenge and blessings of its pursuit. I desire for us to be mutually encouraged so we can finish the race God set before us. {Heb 12.1}. I really want us to get on that secret highway! Earnestly, I desire to end years of my own frustration trying, to determine what it means to be Holy to God, and I do believe God wants to reveal this.

Jesus said *“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.” (Matthew 7:7–8)*

James said: *“Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. (James 4:8)*

Paul said: “...*Seek God... feel your way toward him and find him... He is actually not far from each one of us,*” (Acts 17:27)

Let us find encouragement in these promises, and countless more, that there is reward in searching for God’s answers. I believe if we are earnest, God will reveal the straight and narrow pathway of holiness.

Let’s start by discussing what holiness is not; later we will look at what it is for we cannot arrive at holiness if we do not understand it.¹

Today’s lesson will cover the first of three **Truth Points (TP1-3)**

TP1. Holiness is not internal morality (This week)

TP2. Holiness is not outward righteous actions (Next week)

TP3. Holiness is living life entirely unto the Lord. This will result in morality and righteous actions. (The week thereafter)

TP1 discussion:

Though holiness produces a new morality, the goal is not a morality unto itself. A person can possess an extremely high moral code and absolutely not know God.

*Morality is equivalent to the maintenance of certain relations between man and his fellows, or between man and society, or between man and his own interests considered objectively. These relations may subsist without any inward right feeling... Morality may exist in practice without religion...*²

Jesus did not call us to a new morality. Though moral behavior is essential, it is not holiness. Holiness is living one’s entire life unto the Lord as if to say, “I am no longer my own. I was bought with a price. Now I will glorify God with my body”. When we live to be moral, but do not live entirely unto God, we stop at the place of “just trying to be good” and lose the intimacy of holiness. I can tell you that is a horribly frustrating place in which to reside.

We read in **1st Corinthians 6:19-20** “*Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were*

¹ Holiness is a journey, shaping followers into the image of Jesus where they not only know him, but live just like him. {This is a lifelong pursuit}. To get there we must travel the true pathway of Holiness, avoiding what is false.

² James W. Alexander, [*Thoughts on Preaching; Being Contributions to Homiletics*](#) (Edinburgh; London: Ogle and Murray; Oliver and Boyd; Hamilton, Adams, and Co., 1864), 87.

bought with a price. So, glorify God in your body.” {Often, we try to attain the works without clinging to the intimacy of dwelling with God by his Spirit... How preposterous!}

Many well-intentioned Christians live as if we have been saved to a doctrine of morality that lists what we can and cannot do. We believe that living up to this moral code is all God wants for the *average person in church*. Paul makes clear, God doesn't want us to be just a moral person, but a temple in which God resides, with us living entirely reserved for him. The false doctrine of simple morality is killing the church. Instead of living entirely for Jesus, we often define holiness as a godly attitude, or set of rules, or basis for thought. By this definition, there is no application for morality, only a moral existence with no purpose.

Fact: When we reduce Holiness to morality, we basically create a Christian Law Book. I have been to so many churches that have manuals of behavior to “make people holy”. The book explains what movies to watch, what to eat or drink. What to wear. When to attend church. What activities must be avoided at all costs. Many of us live here. We think Jesus came to save us from beer, R rated movies, smoking and cussing. This view of Holiness is so dangerous. One can do those things and not even know Jesus. Any dog can be taught a trick or two, that doesn't mean the dog is submissive to its master... in fact the dog can hate his master but obey out of fear.

Many Christians fail because they strive for morality, without understanding holiness.

The idea of exactly how to be holy has suffered from many false concepts. In some circles, holiness is equated with a series of specific prohibitions—usually in such areas as smoking, drinking, and dancing. The list of prohibitions varies depending on the group. When we follow this approach to holiness, we are in danger of becoming like the Pharisees with their endless lists of trivial do's and don'ts, and their self-righteous attitude. For others, holiness means a particular style of dress and mannerisms. And for still others, it means unattainable perfection, an idea that fosters either delusion or discouragement about one's sin.³

Over many years of ministry, handfuls of Christians told me how sad, angry, or frustrated they were. They either tried to be moral and failed, or acted moral and still found no sense of satisfaction, no internal delight, only a fear of failing tomorrow. This is no way to live!

People who live for the rules (morality) are often afraid they are not good enough. Worse yet, many think they are OK because they are moral and become puffed up do-gooders. Both sides are in error because holiness is not about morality unto itself, it is

³ Jerry Bridges, [*The Pursuit of Holiness*](#) (Colorado Springs: Navpress, 1978), 15.

about living entirely unto God. It's a radical life of walking with Jesus continually which results in moral behaviors. The reality is, "True morality is imparted by the Spirit of God when we walk in a Holy relationship with him." {Read Galatians 5:16-24}. This relationship is more than "what we should do or shouldn't do". It's about living out the new life God has given. It's about being a temple where God makes his home in you and daily interacts with you. The call of holiness is experiential, not just morality without application.

The life we are given is waaaaaay beyond simple Christian morality. We are invited to radical unity with God which transforms how we look at everything. Married people don't act married to be married. Do they? No; the marriage impacts how they act... or at least it should. We must not try to walk like a Christian to walk with God. When we walk with God we will walk like Christians. It's a huge and wonderful difference.

Just like marriage starts with a commitment, so does holiness. When a couple gets married, they devote their entire lives to being one. When we are born again, we pledge our lives towards living entirely with God. We mess up in marriage and we mess up in faith. If the goal for marriage or faith was only changed behavior, one failure would doom either. Romans 14:8 says now we live unto the Lord. Our whole lives, not just our behaviors, are to be devoted towards knowing God and loving him and learning how to walk after him. This desire for unity with God is the signpost pointing to the Highway of Holiness in the same way a desire to be one with a spouse is the path towards marriage. In both we mess up, but love keeps us going further into complete unity.

The next time we talk, we will journey a little further towards living in holiness. For now, let's conclude TP1 with our **Application for the week:**

Know and understand: Morality is the law repackaged and helps no one. You can be an extremely moral man or woman and be on your way to hell. You can be absolutely moral and not live your life unto the Lord. Like Victorian Era rules, many moral movements cause people to do all sorts of things "to be good", but never draw a person closer to God. Worse yet, they create a false sense of purity based on actions and not on Christ.

Commitment: We pledge to be those who do not live for a morality which produces holiness, but a holy intimacy maintained by right moral behaviors. Our aim is the highest relationship with God which changes our hearts and actions. We will not settle to sit in this world and try to be good for the sake of goodness. No, we desire to reach out to God and take hold of that for which Christ took hold of us. We desire to know and walk with God.

As you conclude this study: Ask yourself these questions:

1. Do I live like all God wants of me is moral behavior?
2. Do I equate moral behaviors with personal holiness?

3. Do I live trying to avoid sins so I can walk with God? Or instead, does my walk with God keep me from sins?
4. How has the pursuit of morality, instead of holiness, impacted my faith in what Jesus alone has done on my behalf?
5. Is morality a chore to please God or a delight because He is pleased already?
6. Am I ready to move past morality alone by a desire to experience God daily, and live devoted only to God?

Gang, if we focus this week on walking with God, we will automatically live separated from this world. Let nothing disrupt the intimacy we are already given. Nurture the mindset of your God given access. Pray without ceasing, be thankful, continually keep your mind on the things above. It will make all the difference.

My testimony: This week an old voice of sin called out to me; fortunately, I was walking with God and the voice seemed appalling instead of appealing. It's a journey; it's a path forward, but fortunately Jesus will direct each step of the day if we seek him and all He brings.

Homework: Read Philippians 3 and 1 Peter 1:13-19

Make notes for yourself. Afterwards go back and revisit the 1st six questions from the introduction to our study