

HOLINESS

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HOLINESS • Session 1

Holy, Holy, Holy

Take the time to carefully read and reflect on the following accounts from Scripture. What can we learn from these passages? What are they teaching us about the holiness of God?

Exodus 3:1-6 – the angel of the LORD appears to Moses in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush

Exodus 24:15-18 – the glory of the LORD like a devouring fire on the top of Mount Sinai

Exodus 33:17-23; 34:29-35 – Moses says to the LORD, “Please show me your glory.”

Joshua 5:13-15 – “I am the commander of the army of the LORD.”

Isaiah 6:1-9 – Isaiah’s vision of the LORD sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up

Ezekiel 1 – Ezekiel’s vision of the glory of the LORD

John 1:1-18 – “We have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father”

Luke 9:28-36 (2 Pet 1:16-18) – the transfiguration of Jesus

Revelation 1:9-20 – John sees the glorified Son of God

HOLINESS • Session 2

Holy Justice

The ultimate aim of all Biblical knowledge is to know God. God's nature is defined first and foremost by the characteristic of holiness—the pure absence of evil. In your own words, rephrase:

- Psalm 5:4 –
- 1 John 1:5 –

God is completely free from any moral evil: he is the essence of moral purity and goodness.

Holiness is the funnel through which God's almighty attributes flow: **omnipotence** (infinite power), **omniscience** (perfect knowledge), and **omnipresence** (all-encompassing presence). How might these attributes be used (or misused) in the hands of a fallible human being?

The holiness of God not only makes the use of his almighty attributes perfectly good, it makes him worthy of our praise, love, and devotion.

What does Psalm 33:4-5 contribute to our understanding of God and his nature?

And Psalm 89:14?

When the Bible speaks of **justice**, conformity to a rule, principle, or norm is implied. In Genesis 18:25, Abraham asked, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?" Using Deuteronomy 32:4, Isaiah 46:8-11, Acts 10:34-35, and James 1:16-17, what can be known about God and justice?

Breaking God's will, to any degree, is called sin (1 John 3:4) and God has been very clear about his absolute abhorrence of sin (Isa 59:1-2; Hab 1:13; 2 Pet 2:19-22). How do these facts relate to our discussion of holiness?

Conclusion: In your own words, how is justice a manifestation of God's holiness?

HOLINESS • Session 3

Holy Love

Justice is not the only manifestation of God's holiness. A complementary facet of God's justice is his love for his creation (Psa 33:4-5). While his justice is perfectly fair and sure, it is always administered in the context of his love. He loves us as a father loves his children. He is actively seeking to accomplish in us what is needed to have a loving relationship with him.

We ended last week's discussion with an emphasis on the seriousness of sin. "The wages of sin is death" (Rom 6:23) and "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23). God's holy love for his people can be seen in:

- His grace (God giving us what we *don't* deserve—life)
- His mercy (God *not* giving us what we *do* deserve—death)

In the Old Testament, God's people were consistently reminded of these aspects of his holy love via the system of animal sacrifice. God, in his love and mercy, allowed the price of life to be paid through an innocent representative. God showed his mercy for men and women created in his image by allowing an innocent animal to pay the price of death owed by the sinner. Those men and women deserved God's holy justice (death), but they received God's mercy (life) instead.

When people were careless with his expectations, God emphasized, "By those who come near Me I must be regarded as holy" (Lev 10:3, NKJV). **How did this system of sacrifice help human beings "regard" God as "holy"?**

In Leviticus 17:11, God told the descendants of Abraham: "For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life." Throughout Old Testament history, the life of innocent animals "atoned" (paid the price) for human sins. God even instituted an annual Day of Atonement as a yearly reminder: "For on this day shall atonement be made for you to cleanse you. You shall be clean before the LORD from all your sins" (Lev 16:30).

For thousands of years, in the form of an untold number of sacrificed animals, God demonstrated both his holy justice (the price of life was paid for sin) and his holy mercy (the sinner was allowed to live). This system was so important that the writer of Hebrews emphasizes, "Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins" (Heb 9:22).

What, then, is the grand significance of John's revelation in John 1:6-8, 19-29?

How does Jesus represent the perfect intersection of holy justice and holy love? And what practical impact does that intersection have for us?

HOLINESS • Session 4

The New Self

Last week we grew in our appreciation of Jesus as the perfect intersection of holy justice and holy love. What practical impact does that intersection have for us? Consider and summarize:

- 1 Peter 2:21-25 –

- Romans 6:1-4 –

Pay particular attention to God’s intention that his redeemed children “might walk in newness of life” (Rom 6:4). What is this “newness of life”?

How do the following passages of Scripture enhance our understanding of the “new self”?

- 2 Corinthians 5:1-21 –

- Ephesians 4:17-5:1 –

- Colossians 3:1-17 –

HOLINESS • Session 5

“You Shall Be Holy, For I Am Holy”

First John 1:5 has been foundational to our understanding of God’s holiness: “This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.”

Notice in 1 John 1:6-2:6 that John does not draw his train of thought to a close with a statement on the holiness of God.

- When John mentions having “fellowship” with God, what does he have in mind?
- In practical terms, what does it mean to “walk in the light, as he is in the light”?
- According to 1 John 2:1-2, what role does Jesus Christ play in the holiness of God’s people?
- In your own words, how would you encapsulate the message of 1 John 2:6?

Take the time to read 1 Peter 1:13-25. Before Peter writes, “as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct,” he delivers several practical admonitions. What does it mean to:

- Prepare your minds for action (literally, *gird up the loins of your mind*) –
- Be sober-minded –
- Set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus –
- Not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance –

How does the application of these admonitions help in answering the call to be holy in all your conduct, as God is holy?

Finally, spend time reflecting on Hebrews 12:1-17. The writer assures us of the fact that our heavenly Father “disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness” (12:10). Why are discipline and holiness logically linked together in Scripture?

What impact does Hebrews 12:14 have on any discussion of the holiness of God and his children?

HOLINESS • Session 6

The Pattern of Piety

“Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord” (Heb 12:14). What exactly are we “striving” to become? God saved us to be holy—got it. We must be holy as God is holy—check. We are set apart to serve God—sounds good. But what does holiness actually look like? In your own words, how would you help someone else to see...

WHAT HOLINESS IS NOT:

- Mere rule keeping (Mark 7:1-8) –
- Generational imitation (Ezek 18:19-20) –
- Generic spirituality (Rom 12:1-2) –
- Finding your “true self” (1 Cor 6:9-11) –
- The way of the world (1 John 2:15-17) –

WHAT HOLINESS IS:

- The renewal of God’s image in us (Gen 1:26; Eccl 7:29; Col 3:5-10; Eph 4:20-24; 2 Cor 3:18) –
- A life marked by virtue instead of vice (Gal 5:16-26) –
- A clean conscience (Heb 10:19-23) –
- Obedience to God’s commands (1 John 2:1-6; John 14:15, 23; 15:9-11) –
- Christlikeness (Col 1:15; Heb 1:3; Rom 8:26-30) –

HOLINESS • Session 7

An Unholy World

If holiness is the renewal of God's image in us, obedience to God's commands, and Christlikeness, it makes sense that Paul would write what he does in Romans 12. He begins with an appeal to Christians:

Present your bodies as a living sacrifice, **holy**, and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. (Rom 12:1-2)

Shortly thereafter, he commands: "Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good" (Rom 12:9). Take your time with those three phrases. What should we make of:

- Let love be genuine (*anypokritos*: sincere, without hypocrisy) –
- Abhor (*apostungountes*: loathe, be disgusted with) what is evil –
- Hold fast (*kollömenoi*: embrace, used for sexual union in 1 Cor 6:16) to what is good –

Why must genuine love for God hate evil?

When God refers to evil, what does he have in mind? Consider these lists of vices that characterize the wicked and the sort of people who will not enter the kingdom of God:

- Mark 7:21-22 –
- Romans 1:24-31 –
- Romans 13:13 –
- 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 –
- Galatians 5:19-21 –
- Colossians 3:5-9 –
- 1 Timothy 1:9-10 –
- Revelation 21:8 –

HOLINESS • Session 8

The Anatomy of Holiness

Present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy, and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. (Rom 12:1)

Let's take the time to make God's call for holiness personal and practical. In what ways must the Christian present his/her...

- Mind –

- Eyes –

- Ears –

- Mouth –

- Hands –

- Sexual organs –

- Feet –

...as a living sacrifice, holy, and acceptable to God?

When we lose track of what holiness is actually about, we should scan our bodies from head to toe and remember what God desires us to be.

HOLINESS • Session 9

The Motivation for Holiness

The Bible is a big, diverse, wise book, and in it you can find a variety of prescriptions to encourage obedience to God's commands. Consider some of the ways in which the Bible motivates us to pursue holiness. How would you summarize what the following statements communicate about:

- Duty (Eccl 12:13) –
- God knows all and sees all (Eccl 12:14) –
- It's right (Eph 6:1) –
- It's for our good (Deut 12:28) –
- God's example (Eph 4:32) –
- Christ's example (Eph 5:2) –
- Assurance (2 Pet 1:10) –
- Being effective as a Christian (2 Pet 1:8) –
- Jesus' return (2 Pet 3:11-12) –
- This world is not our home (1 Pet 2:11) –
- To win over our neighbors (1 Pet 2:12) –
- To lift up a nation (Prov 14:34) –
- For the public good (Matt 5:13) –
- For the sake of our prayers (1 Pet 3:7) –
- The futility of sin (Matt 6:27) –
- The folly of sin (Matt 7:26-27) –
- The promise of grace (Matt 6:33) –
- The promise of future judgment (Rom 12:19) –
- The fear of future judgment (Heb 10:26-27) –

- The surety of our inheritance (Heb 10:34) –
- The fellowship of the saints (Heb 12:1) –
- The good example of others (Heb 13:7) –
- The bad example of others (1 Cor 10:6) –
- We were created for good works (Eph 2:10) –
- God is the master and we are his servants (Luke 17:10) –
- The fear of the Lord (2 Cor 5:11) –
- The love of the Lord (1 John 4:11) –
- To make God manifest (1 John 4:12) –
- In gratitude for grace (Rom 12:1) –
- For the glory of God (1 Cor 6:19-20) –
- The character of God (Lev 11:44) –
- The work of God (Exo 20:2-3) –
- To please God (Heb 13:16) –
- To avoid the devil's snares (Eph 4:26-27) –
- For an eternal reward (1 Tim 6:18-19) –
- Because Christ has all authority (Matt 28:18-20) –
- Love for Christ (John 14:15) –
- Fullness of joy (John 15:10-11) –
- To experience God's favor (Prov 12:2) –
- Our union with Christ (Rom 6:5-6) –

How does this great variety of motivations reinforce the truth of 1 John 5:3?

For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.

HOLINESS • Session 10

Holy Warfare

Several weeks ago, we noted the commission of Hebrews 12:14 – “Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.” Holy people don’t act like the unholy world around them. Holy people live in a way that reflects their dedication to God and their trust in his word. Holy people are not holy by accident. Holy people are holy because they are conducting holy warfare in the strength that God supplies.

What can we learn about holy warfare from 2 Corinthians 10:1-6?

And Ephesians 6:10-20?

Why is Paul’s first statement in this context—“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might” (Eph 6:10) so important?

The New Testament consistently emphasizes that growth in holiness is going to require “striving” on the part of the Christian. What input can be gleaned from:

- Romans 8:12-13 –
- Romans 6:1-14 –
- Ephesians 4:17-24 –
- Colossians 3:5-11 –
- 1 Timothy 6:11-12 –

Christians “strive.” They strive to kill sin and to “keep in step” with the Spirit (Gal 5:25). They have rest in the gospel, but never rest in their battle against the flesh and the devil. The child of God is known for his inner warfare and his inner peace (more about the latter next week).

HOLINESS • Session 11

The Peace and Joy of Holiness

For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. (Rom 14:17)

There can be no doubt from his revelation to mankind that God intends the Christian life to be a life of joy, not drudgery. The idea that holiness will be inseparably tied to a miserable life is an absolute lie. In fact, just the opposite is true. Only those who walk in holiness experience true joy.

How does a self-centered, godless approach to life PROMISE “joy,” but ultimately lead to emptiness and the absence of true joy?

On the flipside, consider the words of Jesus in John 15:10-11.

“If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.”

When Jesus spoke of his joy, what did he have in mind?

Practically speaking, how can the joy of Jesus be “in” me?

How will this lead to joy that is “full”?

Long ago, David wrote of God in Psalm 16:11, “You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.” What can we learn from these words?

The same David, after he had committed adultery with Bathsheba, pleaded with God in Psalm 51:12, “Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.” What can we learn from these words?

In your own words, how would you summarize the relationship between holiness and joy? In what way can “the joy of the LORD” be “your strength” (Neh 8:10)?

HOLINESS • Session 12

Bringing Holiness to Completion in the Fear of God

“Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.” (2 Cor 7:1)

What “promises” does Paul have in view? (see 2 Cor 6:14-18)

What is meant by the invitation to “cleanse ourselves”?

In what way have our bodies and spirits been “defiled”?

Where we’ve been this quarter:

- Holy, holy holy –
- Holy justice –
- Holy love –
- The new self –
- “You shall be holy, for I am holy” –
- The pattern of piety –
- An unholy world –
- The anatomy of holiness –
- The motivation for holiness –
- Holy warfare –
- The peace and joy of holiness –

In light of the logical flow of this study, what does Paul mean when he highlights our opportunity and responsibility to “bring holiness to completion in the fear of God”?