

pursuing holiness

A small group resource developed from
In Search of Holiness and Practical Holiness

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Preface

Since the release of David K. Bernard's *In Search of Holiness* and *Practical Holiness*, over 150,000 of his works on holiness have been distributed. The sincere, balanced voice of this trusted author and leader continues to provide direction to Christians in our search to understand how to live a life pleasing to God.

This new volume is a compilation of *In Search of Holiness* and *Practical Holiness*, following the author's direction. It presents a revised study of selected material from each volume. Discussion questions are included at the end of each chapter for use in a group setting or for reflection in personal study. The author has recorded a series of video introductions to help make this volume suited for small group study.

As with the previous volumes, you can trust this book to provide carefully researched biblical evidence for holiness, and as such it is a valued new addition to the Word Aflame Press collection and now for your library as well.

The background is a light gray gradient. It features several abstract elements: a bright lens flare with radiating lines in the upper right; a series of overlapping, semi-transparent circles of varying sizes in the lower left; and a trail of small, semi-transparent circles leading from the lower left towards the center.

Session 1

1

A Call to Holiness

“Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord” (Hebrews 12:14).

The Bible calls followers of Christ to a life of holiness and teaches its necessity. “Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord” (Hebrews 12:14, NKJV). The work of salvation begins with regeneration, or the new birth; continues with sanctification, a process of progressively becoming more like Christ in this life; and concludes with glorification, or resurrection with an immortal body and sinless perfection. Just as we must be born again to see the kingdom of God, so we must pursue holiness, or sanctification, in order to see the Lord. Holiness is not an option: it is a command to be implemented in all aspects of our lives. “As He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, ‘Be holy, for I am holy’” (I Peter 1:15-16, NKJV). We obey this command in order to please God, for we belong to Him; to communicate Christ to others; and to benefit ourselves, both now and for eternity.

The new birth is the initial experience of salvation, but the work of salvation does not end there. God calls the Christian to a continued life of holiness. It is imperative for the born-again believer to experience the continuing work of sanctification, which comes by daily submission to the leadership and control of the Holy Spirit. Just as we must be born

again to see the kingdom of God (John 3:3-5), so must we follow holiness or sanctification in order to see the Lord. The new birth will have no eternal value unless the born-again person continues to walk by faith and live after the new nature of the Spirit, allowing God to complete the work of salvation that began at the new birth.

This chapter presents in condensed form the basic principles of holiness.

Definition of Holiness

God is holy; holiness is an essential attribute of His nature. With respect to Him, it means absolute purity, and moral perfection. With respect to humankind, holiness means conformity to the character and will of God. We must be holy because God is holy (I Peter 1:15-16). It means thinking as God thinks, loving what He loves, hating what He hates, and acting as Christ would act.

Specifically, holiness consists of two components: (1) *separation* from sin and the world's values and (2) *dedication* to God and His will. "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing: and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty. Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (II Corinthians 6:17-7:1). "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God" (Romans 12:1-2). The truth of Christ is "that ye put off, concerning your former

conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in righteousness and true holiness" (Ephesians 4:22-24, NKJV).

Holiness means to be like Christ. Instead of gratifying sinful desires, we put on Christ, letting Him be formed in us and adopting His mind (Romans 13:14; Galatians 4:19; Philippians 2:5). We judge decisions and actions by asking, What would Jesus do?

Holiness also means we cannot love this ungodly world system, identify with it, become attached to the things in it, or participate in its sinful pleasures and activities. "Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God" (James 4:4). "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world" (I John 2:15-16). One important aspect of pure and undefiled religion is for a person to keep unspotted from the world (James 1:27).

Holiness involves both the inner person and the outer person (I Corinthians 6:19-20; I Thessalonians 5:23). We must perfect holiness by cleansing ourselves of filthiness both of the flesh and of the spirit (II Corinthians 7:1). For example, lustful thoughts are as sinful as an act of adultery (Matthew 5:27-28), and hatred is just as sinful as murder (I John 3:15). Holiness, then, includes attitudes, thoughts, and spiritual stewardship on the one hand and actions, appearance, and physical stewardship on the other. One without the other is insufficient. Inward holiness will produce outward holiness, but the outward appearance of holiness is worthless without inward holiness. For example, a modest spirit will produce

modest dress, but modest dress is of little value if it conceals a lustful heart.

Holiness comes by faith, love, and walking after the Spirit. First, as with all aspects of salvation, we receive sanctification by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9). Holiness is not a means of earning salvation but a result of salvation. We cannot manufacture our own holiness; we are partakers of God's holiness (Hebrews 12:10). Genuine faith results in obedience (Romans 1:5; 16:26; James 2:14-26). Thus, if we truly believe God, we will believe and obey His Word, which in turn will lead to the pursuit of holiness. If we deliberately and persistently disobey God's Word, then we are no longer walking in faith.

Second, if we truly love God, we will obey God's commandments (John 14:15, 23). Without love, all attempts to live for God are vain (I Corinthians 13:1-13). When we truly love God, we will actively hate evil (Psalm 97:10), and we will seek to become like our holy God. Love is stricter and more demanding than law, for love always goes further than duty. Love for God will cause us to draw closer to God than law will, both in attitudes and in disciplined living. Love will cause us to avoid everything that displeases God or hinders a closer walk with Him. Love rejects anything incompatible with godliness or not conducive to spiritual life, even though no law specifically labels it as sin. In this way, the principle of love leads to greater holiness than does the law of Moses or any other codification of rules. Love dominates all actions and all relationships.

Third, through the Spirit's guidance and power, we can overcome sin and live righteously (Romans 8:2-4; Galatians 5:16). We have freedom from sin's dominion—the power to choose not to sin (John 8:34-36; Romans 6:1-25). We will not continue to live in sin; indeed, when we act according to our new identity we cannot sin (I John 3:9). We still have the ability to sin and we still struggle with the inward nature of sin

(Galatians 5:16-17; I John 1:8; 2:1), but as long as we let the Holy Spirit lead us we will not sin.

Holiness is not an external law but an integral part of our new identity. The Spirit places God's moral law within us, not written on stone tablets but in our hearts (Hebrews 10:16). We do not merely follow an external list of rules, but we follow the Holy Spirit within us. We pursue holiness because that is who we are and want to be. We abstain from sin and worldliness because it is anathema to our new nature. We still struggle against the desires of the old nature, but it is an internal struggle. Nobody imposes rules on us; we restrict our flesh because we wish to follow the Spirit. We understand the beauty of holiness.

Following Holiness Requires Personal Effort

Holiness does not come automatically as we rest passively. Some teach that any attempt to live holy is "of the flesh," but they fail to understand that genuine faith always includes obedience and always produces good works. We must open our lives to the working of God's Spirit. We must actively implement the spiritual principles He places in us. We must resist the devil, subdue the sinful nature, discipline the flesh, and kill the deeds of the body.

Thus, the Bible teaches, "Reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God" (Romans 6:11-13). "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you" (James 4:7-8). "Make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him" (II Peter 3:14, NIV). Paul said,

“I run . . . I fight . . . I discipline my body and bring it into subjection” (I Corinthians, 9:26-27, NKJV). The Bible exhorts, “Let us cleanse ourselves. . . . Let us labour. . . . Let us lay aside every weight and . . . sin . . . let us run with patience” (II Corinthians 7:1; Hebrews 4:11; 12:1).

Philippians 2:12-13 sums it up well. “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.” God gives believers both the desire and the power to live righteously. It is our responsibility to reverently and watchfully implement holiness in our lives, and this takes great personal effort and exertion. At the same time, God is actually the One working in us, and He provides both the desire and the power to live righteously. God’s grace works *in* us, but we must work it *out*.

We wait for God to liberate us from struggles and temptations, when God expects us to use the power we already have in the Spirit and force the flesh to obey His Word. It is like the man who received a compliment on his garden: “You and God have really made this piece of land beautiful and productive!” The gardener replied, “You should have seen it when God had it by Himself.”

A Daily Walk

If we live one day at a time, holiness becomes a possibility rather than an impossibility. We have the power of the Spirit and the promise that God will not allow us to be tempted beyond our capacity to bear it (I Corinthians 10:13). Therefore, unlike an unsaved person, we can say, “Regardless of the circumstances that will face me, I can live today without sinning.” If we do sin that day, we can obtain forgiveness and begin the day anew. Jesus encouraged this type of thinking, for He told those whom He delivered, “Go, and sin no more” (John 5:14; 8:11). He also gave absolute perfection as the

goal for which to strive: “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect” (Matthew 5:48).

A Continual Growth Process

The life of holiness is one of continual growth toward perfection or maturity (Matthew 5:48; II Corinthians 7:1; Philippians 3:12-16). Even though no one is absolutely perfect or holy as God is, we can all be perfect (mature) and holy in a relative sense (II Corinthians 7:1; Philippians 3:15; Colossians 1:28; 4:12). God will consider us holy if we live a repented life, have faith in Christ, live according to the knowledge of His Word, and strive to become progressively more Christ-like (Ephesians 4:13). He expects us to grow continually in grace and knowledge (Mark 4:26-29; II Peter 3:18), and to bear more and more spiritual fruit (John 15:1-8). If we do not become progressively more holy and Christ-like in thought, attitude, conduct, and lifestyle, something is wrong.

God evaluates us individually on the basis of where we have come from, what He has given us, and what our ability is (Matthew 13:23; 25:14-30). Two Christians can both be perfect in God’s sight even though they have attained different levels of perfection in an absolute sense, just as two children at two different stages of growth can both be perfectly normal and healthy. We must not judge one another or compare one with another, but must be patient and tolerant of different levels of perfection, endeavoring to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Matthew 7:1-5; II Corinthians 10:12; Ephesians 4:1-3).

None of us has yet attained the fullness of perfection. Paul wrote, “Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting